

January 15, 2008

## Racing Toward Green

By Jennifer Kho

The American Le Mans announces its green initiatives as car companies introduce lean, green, sporty machines in Detroit. Meanwhile, Europe considers cutting proposed biofuels targets and banning the import of some biofuel crops.

The American Le Mans Series is going green for its 2008 racing season.

While all the race cars in the series already use alternative fuels, the series said Tuesday it will be the first to meet the new "green racing" criteria developed in partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Department of Energy and SAE International.

The criteria include the use of renewable biofuel; multiple engines, fuels and powertrain configurations; regenerative-energy powertrain technologies; and emission-control strategies and systems, as well as "well-to-wheel" analysis of energy use and greenhouse-gas emissions.

The series also is introducing E85, a blend of 85 percent ethanol and 15 percent gasoline, as a fuel option this year, and announced it is creating a new serieswide competition called the "Green Racing Challenge."

The challenge, to be held during the 1,000-mile Petite Le Mans race Oct. 2 in Georgia, is meant to encourage manufacturers to introduce and develop greener vehicle technologies, according to the series. The EPA, DOE and SAE are working with the American Le Mans Series to develop the rules of the challenge, scheduled to be announced later this spring.

The news isn't the first attempt to make racing greener.

The IndyCar Series in 2006 began using a blend of 10-percent ethanol and 90-percent gasoline and in 2007 switched to 100-percent ethanol fuel (see Indy 500 to Run on Ethanol).

Formula One also is requiring a blend of at least 5.75 percent biofuel this year and plans to move to 100-percent biofuel for a championship in 2009. Formula One teams also are working on other green technologies, such as kinetic energy recovery systems -- which use braking heat to help propel the cars -- expected to be



The Drayson-Barwell Aston Martin Vantage will be powered by bio-ethanol.

Source: American Le Mans

introduced next season.

While the car races use very little of the world's fuel -- meaning that switching to biofuels makes barely a dent in the global greenhouse-gas emissions -- they could play a role in changing consumers' perceptions of greener cars.

After all, it wasn't long ago that "electric cars" conjured up only golf carts. And the best-selling hybrid still is the Toyota Prius, which some auto analysts have described as more nerdy than sporty in appearance.

But companies committed to making greener cars cool now seem to be taking a sportier route.

Take the very recognizable, sleek -- and expensive -- Tesla Roadster and Venturi Fetish, for example (see Venturi Goes Kinky).

At the North American International Auto Show in Detroit, it's become clear that companies are pushing the trend further.

Fisker Automotive on Monday unveiled its Karma, a sporty plug-in hybrid with a rooftop solar panel, and even Ferrari displayed a greener concept car - a Spider that uses E85 and gets the same horsepower as the original (see Automakers Vie for Green Cred).

And there's evidence that series like the American Le Mans influences automakers, as well as everyday drivers: Audi, which has raced a diesel car in the American Le Mans Series for the last two years -- and won it both times - unveiled a diesel-powered R8 concept road car at the Detroit show.

But as the American Le Mans adds more biofuel, Europe -- the birthplace of the original Le Mans Series -- is considering cutting back on its biofuels targets and banning imports of some biofuel crops (see Reuters, the Guardian and the New York Times stories).

Meanwhile, the United States is continuing to aggressively pursue the stuff. The U.S. Department of Energy is expected to award \$200 million in grants for cellulosic-ethanol pilot and demonstration plants next month (see Reuters story).