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Claus Sauter, Bioenergy Expert, Founder & CEO of VERBIO AG addresses current issues of (bio)energy, energy security and (green) mobility

Column

Free the automotive industry from the electricity trap!

Current legislation suggests that electric-powered cars are an attractive option, while completely ignoring the real ecological advantage of CNG vehicles!

European law limits the emissions of fleet vehicles sold by a manufacturer from 2020 to a maximum of 95 gram CO₂ for each kilometre. Painful penalties are being threatened for those that exceed this limit. There is great pressure on the automobile manufacturers. The penalties faced by VW alone could be as high as EUR 3.2 billion from 2021, as there is a long way to go to meet these targets based on the current product portfolio.

At this point, the critics are always first to point out that Germany has simply missed the boat to develop electric vehicles in time, and that the electric car is THE climate-friendly alternative. E-mobility is currently fashionable and it is promoted as the saviour of our environment and of the automobile industry in particular. It is hypocrisy to suggest that the electric car is emission-free, but the vehicle manufacturers do not have any other alternative, as politicians deny them the opportunity to make use of the climatic advantages of other innovative fuel sources!

Emission limits are calculated in accordance with the EU regulation 443/2009 under the “Tank-to-Wheel” approach, which means that the emissions that result from manufacturing the fuel itself is ignored. The “Tank-to-Wheel” approach for the electric car also completely ignores the fact that electricity in Germany and Europe is still primarily generated in coal-fired power stations – which makes no sense of the claim that the power is emission-free. Despite this, each electric car sold is recorded in the limit calculation as having emissions of ZERO gram CO₂ for each kilometre. Completely acceptable, completely legal, politically driven, but an environmental fraud.

And now the government and the automobile industry are using advertising campaigns and subsidy schemes to pressure German consumers into buying as many electric cars as possible. All this despite the fact that an adequate recharging infrastructure does not exist, and despite the fact there is no resolution for the numerous start-up problems associated with vehicle range and charge-up cycles. However, the clever, conservative German car driver will not play this game, despite the subsidy!

At the same time, the brakes are being put on other alternative powertrain technologies which have long overcome their start-up issues and which offer a genuine advantage for climate protection. These innovative emission-free powertrain systems include CNG vehicles powered by biomethane from waste materials. Taking an honest approach to ALL emissions – which means taking a “Well-to-Wheel” approach – these achieve up to 90 percent savings in emissions of CO2 and nitrogen oxide. Furthermore, the current edition of the magazine DER SPIEGEL* presents its readers with an overview of these advanced fuels.

If government policies would make use of the evidence of “Well-to-Wheel” emissions in addition to the “Tank-to-Wheel” analysis for calculating emissions limits, both manufacturers and consumers would have access to a broader range of affordable climate-friendly alternatives to petrol-based and diesel fuels.

The automobile manufacturers would be freed from the electricity trap and would have an incentive to provide massive marketing support for CNG-powered vehicles. As a wide range of mass-produced CNG-powered vehicles are already available in numerous models, the industry would save development costs and avoid the threat of penalty payments. The final consumer would have more choice and cheaper alternatives for ecological mobility, and climate protection would benefit – and not only just on paper.

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