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## Couple's car runs on vegetable oil

By Silvia Casabianca

**Russell and Nicole Van Riper have a car whose exhaust might make them hungry for French fries. The reason: the 1980 Mercedes Benz the young East Naples couple drive uses waste vegetable oil as fuel.**

Their car, which was born a diesel, doesn't look very different from a normal car, except for the extra fuel tank in the trunk that has a line attached to the basic fuel supply line. There are also a number of extra pipes under the hood and a cylinder that permits proper heat exchange and maintains the fuel at a temperature that prevents it from clogging.

Driving a so-called "biofuel" vehicle comes natural to Russell Van Riper, who has long been interested in technologies and policies that protect the environment. "As a Florida native, I'm distraught by how the land is being destroyed," he said. "And, on the other side, I don't like Exxon running my government." Van Riper's interest in biofuel was sparked by a magazine article explaining that a diesel car could be easily converted into one running on vegetable oil. The possibility of lower fuel emissions and reduced costs prompted him to contact Captain John Puig of Naples Biodiesel, who sold the Van Ripers an upgraded Mercedes and told them on how to convert a second car by themselves. "As a boat captain, John knows some mechanics,"

Van Riper said. "He was the first one to convert a diesel engine into a straight vegetable oil (SVO) here in Naples." Van Riper described how Rudolf Diesel, a refrigerator engineer who loved engine designs, published a paper in 1873 describing an internal combustion engine using a fuel that could be ignited without a spark. The fuel he suggested was peanut oil. In 1897, such an engine was successfully operated for the first time. Diesel conceived the engine bearing his name to enable independent craftsmen and artisans to compete with large industry. Today, the diesel engine moves most United States freight. About a million new diesels are introduced on to American roads every year. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, diesel engines emit nitrogen oxides and particulate matter that have been tied to serious health problems, including respiratory and cardiovascular disease. Diesel exhaust has also been linked to increased incidence of lung cancer. Biodiesel engines, which can run on the oils of peanut, canola, soy, corn, sunflower, palm, olive, coconut, hemp, and sesame, among others, burn cleaner than diesel-fueled engines. Proponents say the engines don't contribute to acid rain or global warming, like cars running on fossil fuels do. They also say that a vegetable oil car does not produce black smoke like a diesel, and spills are biodegradable.

Besides lowering vehicle emissions, the Van Ripers say their car saves them between \$100 and \$120 in fuel each month. A diesel-vegetable oil conversion can cost \$2,000. The Van Ripers get their fuel from restaurants that are happy to get rid of their waste oil. To be suited for fuel use "the oil cannot be heated to very high temperatures," Van Riper explained. And it has to be passed through a filter that was also devised by Captain Puig.

Six other people in Naples have upgraded their diesel engines to run on vegetable oil. Naples Biofuel is presently updating a church bus to run on SVO Hybrid power. Captain Puig and Van Riper will present the vegetable oil cars in the Earth Day celebrations in Koreshan Park in Estero and in Rogers Park in Naples on April 22. Those who want more information on the technology can go to [www.naplesbiodiesel.com](http://www.naplesbiodiesel.com).



*Russell Van Riper shows off his Mercedes Benz's engine. His car doesn't look very different from a gas or diesel-run car. Van Riper's main motivation to have a car that operates on vegetable oil was an environmental one: lower fuel emissions.*



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