

# TRUCK TRACKS

by Ken Kelley



## Grabbing an industry by the tailpipe



High cost of fuel and plans to control exhaust rank as the top two truck concerns of this decade.

Looked at as one big problem, truck fuel and exhaust emissions are on the road to staking out a position as the top truck-related concern of this new decade.

An all-out effort to find out where things are headed has turned up more doubts and new questions than positive projections.

The people who should be in the know, whether they be in government or on the manufacturing end, just don't seem to be agreeing on evaluations of this fuel fiasco.

Runaway inflation of truck fuel prices has become a fact of life in recent months, while inflation through the rest of the economy has been mild. Truck operators could be making a bad situation worse with reactions that include price boosts in one form or another.

There is no denying that there is trouble out there. For example, truck driver strikes have spread to Europe; Americans in New England don't know how they will be able to afford this winter's home heating oil a product much like diesel fuel; and high fuel costs are gripping the airlines with more than their usual amount of business panic.

Chaos would not be reigning supreme in the truck world if there were a little less confusion on the subject of exhaust emission suppression.

Back in 1998, the regulators said engine makers cheated on getting their powerplants' exhaust controls approved. The engine makers said they didn't, were hit with a record environmental fine and the regulators' emission rules were turned upside down.

The results of those developments are still being worked out in regulatory circles and in courts. Diesel emission rules once proposed for 2004 and now due for 2002 could be coming too soon for the manufacturers to meet them on time.

### Tapped out

It seems like each time future emission limits are discussed the projection is that the fumes will be cut to, or below, the bone. But people in the manufacturing world estimate that it will, in effect, cost truckers their fortunes.

Environmentalists who are said to want "diesel exhausts to come out of tailpipes cleaner than the air that went in" have taken a lot of rap from truck operators.

The future of the truck world would be a lot clearer and brighter if regulatory concerns on emission topics could be resolved. This is no plea to deny the combatants their

days in court, just a suggestion that the number of days be reduced to some shorter and reasonable level.

At this point it seems that doing something to assure the U.S. that a supply of reasonably priced petroleum needed for a robust economy is an even more pressing challenge than rationalizing exhaust emission regulations.

Efforts to increase the oil supply have done little so far. Every time the U.S. applies pressure for more oil from foreign suppliers, a small increase is promised after the problem nears the "out-of-hand" stage. Happily, we seem to have run out of good excuses not to tap the emergency petroleum reserve.

One wonders if increased production of domestic petroleum might be a logical step toward easing current fuel troubles.

This nation was once self-sufficient with regard to petroleum. Granted, consumption has increased over the years, but the flow of North Slope oil from Alaska has added to the potential domestic supply. Are we holding back on oil production here while the rest of the oil-producing nations exhaust their resources?

Some overseas students of the oil situation talk about the Last Drop Day. They say that planet Earth will run dry some-day, and suggest developing one or more potential alternative fuel sources as the wise way to prepare for the future. **R<sub>B</sub>**

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