State VFW proves E85 use is a practical alternative to foreign oil

WATERTOWN - The pioneer spirit is thriving among those who continue to promote new uses of bio-based fuels. Ten pioneering citizens wanting to make this nation truly independent from foreign oil drove their autos on half E85 in the South Dakota Veterans of Foreign Wars’ Fourth of July “drive for energy independence”.

They added to the body of research that indicates South Dakota can cut its gasoline consumption in half tomorrow by using locally produced 85 percent ethanol, or E85.

South Dakota all ready produces enough ethanol to replace all of its current gasoline use. VFW members and other participants made the approximately 100-mile demonstration drive running on half E85 in their personal non-flex fuel autos.

Nearly all the drivers have been experimenting with up to half E85 in their standard autos for several years and have found performance similar to gasoline as confirmed by the drive average of over 25 miles per gallon.

World War II veteran Joe Matthews and his wife Sylvia made the trip in their 2003 Ford Crown Victoria. Joe commented, “We need to break our gasoline habit. I hope publicity from this event causes farm groups and others to show an interest in searching out just what percentage of ethanol we can safely use in South Dakota’s current fleet of cars.”

The newest car making the trip was a 2005 Grand Prix and the oldest was the 1988 Corsica that was converted to run on E85 some 15 years ago by the South Dakota Corn Growers Association. The Corsica traveled nearly 160,000 trouble free miles for the corn growers and was running on 85 percent ethanol before GM made an official flex fuel auto.

The computer chip change made by the Corn Growers was converted back to original equipment and the car is now owned by the VFW’s balanced energy committee chairman Ortie Swayne.

“This pioneering car was running on E85 before GM made a designated flex fuel auto. The Corn Growers disassembled the engine at approximately 160,000 miles and found the engine parts exceptionally clean and like new,” Swayne said. “I hope auto companies haven’t designed the newer cars to be less compatible with higher blends of ethanol.”

Archie Hanson demonstrated that diesel pickups can also cut their diesel consumption in half. Archie made the trip running on half soy oil additive produced at his plant near Aberdeen.

South Dakota VFW commander Gary Knudson summed up the “energy independence day drive” by saying “South Dakota leads the nation in per capita ethanol production. It looks to me we are in a position to show other states how they too can use local ethanol production to dramatically reduce their gasoline consumption.”

Other participants included: Rick and Marva Barg, Sioux Falls, Owen Jones, Britton; Nancy Minder, Jason Frenrichs, Dick and Marie Renelt, Wilmot; Sharellyn Renelt and John Baskfield, Minneapolis, Doug Sombke.

From left, Jason Frenrichs, Sylvia and Joe Matthews and Orrie Swayne stand next to demonstration vehicles used in the South Dakota VFW’s experiment using blends of E-85.