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'GREEN CRUISE' EVENT DRAWS HUGE CROWD

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A huge turnout of nearly 300 packed the front parking lot of the Fox & Hounds restaurant in Bloomfield Hills Friday morning for "Green Performance: A New Way to Cruise," a business breakfast sponsored by WWJ Newsradio 950 and the Michigan Economic Development Corp.

The event featured three panel discussions on advanced automotive technologies in electric cars, hybrids, clean diesels and alternative fuels that will no doubt be represented in future Woodward Dream Cruises.

Clark Campbell, motorsport manager of Volkswagen of America Inc., said he was working on clean, fast diesels for future environmentally-friendly cruising.

Peter Horbury, executive director of design for the Americas at Ford Motor Co., said he'd unnerved past crowds at the Dream Cruise attendees by speeding away from the line in a totally silent electric vehicle.

Scott Staley talked about Ford's 530-hp fuel cell Ford Focus that was clocked at 207 mph at Bonneville Slat Flats. The effort was meant to prove that green does not have to mean slow and stodgy. The name of the vehicle, the Ford 999, was taken from a Henry Ford concept vehicle that in turn was named after a 19th Century locomotive that was the fastest vehicle on Earth in its time.

Panelists said hydrogen could easily replace gasoline for internal combustion engines -- the problem is the lack of a hydrogen infrastructure and the fact that producing hydrogen is still less efficient and more expensive than producing gasoline.

Campbell said Volkswagen has been sending diesel racers up Colorado's Pike's Peak -- but that race drivers needed to be retrained to shift at lower RPM points to take advantage of a diesel engine's low-RPM torque vs. a gasoline engine. He also said Volkswagen is already using B5 biodiesel in its racing engines.

Several panels were interrupted by Dream Cruisers nearby on Woodward Avenue. After one particularly loud pass, Campbell said: "I don't know if that's 'green' cruising, but it's cool."

The second panel featured Neil Armstrong, the Chrysler LLC representative on its joint hybrid venture with BMW and General Motors Corp. who said the joint venture aims to create the next level in hybrid technology -- not just better city mileage, but also better highway mileage and more performance.

Christopher J. Qualters, director of marketing for diesel systems at Robert Bosch LLC, said the future will have room for "all of the above" in alternative energy power plants -- hybrids, electrics, fuel cells, alternative fuels and modern clean diesels. He said today's best diesels are 90 percent cleaner than diesel engines of 15 years ago, and emit 20 percent less greenhouse gases than an equivalent gasoline engine. Their superior torque performance also makes them more fun to drive.

The day's final panel featured names familiar to GLITR readers -- NextEnergy CEO James Croce, Biofuel Industries Group LLC CEO Terry J. Nosan, and Chrysler LLC senior manager of materials and fuels Loren Beard.

Beard said alternative fuels are a critical component to Chrysler's drive to achieve more fuel efficiency, with a particular emphasis on flex-fuel and biodiesel vehicles. He said one stumbling block is that there is no national standard for

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B20 biodiesel, a blend of 20 percent plant and animal oils and 80 percent petroleum diesel fuel. He also said more work needs to be done on ethanol produced from non-food sources.

Croce said NextEnergy is helping Michigan entrepreneurs in the alternative fuel industry, and with the existing supply chain to help them diversify into sustainable energy technologies. He said Michigan "unequivocally yes can fuel the future," with its unique combination of industrial and agricultural strengths. But he said Michigan faces a "talent gap" in serial entrepreneurs that are venture capital-backed. And he said there's been a delay in the state enacting public policies to encourage sustainable energy technology.

Croce also called hydrogen the "ultimate endgame" for automotive technology as it completes its transformation from carbon-based fuels. He said that hydrogen's cost, at the equivalent of \$4 to \$5 a gallon, and availability are still issues.

Nosan said he's enthused about the prospects for his young industry. His company cut the ribbon on a 20 million gallon a year biodiesel production plant in Adrian on Aug. 14, a plant that aims to apply consistent quality concepts like Six Sigma to biodiesel production to increase reliability. He said the plant would produce laboratory-tested biodiesel that matches the industry's ASTM standard. He also said the industry is limited only by the availability of feedstocks -- vegetable oils and animal fats. The key is finding underutilized land that can produce quality oils, and research is also underway on growing algae in bioreactors that would produce biodiesel, Nosan said.

Friday's event followed a "Grand Prix-view" event Thursday night showcasing the cars that will be racing again around Belle Isle on Labor Day weekend. Friday morning, Grand Prix event chairman Bud Denker said there were only 4,000 tickets available for the race -- 48,000 have been sold.

For pictures of the Thursday night event, visit <http://www.wvj.com/pages/813576.php>.

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