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Don Novak displays components of his super-efficient gasoline burner.

By Joe Heiberger—The Washington Post

Inventor's Explosive Secret

Getting 200 Miles a Gallon on a Car

By [illegible] Washington Post Staff Writer

For the past two nights, some 200 [illegible] nerved motorists have packed [illegible] the Washington Hilton at $15 a [illegible] to learn how to get 200 miles a gallon from the family car.

The secret, they hear from a [illegible] suited pitchman named Don Novak, 34, is to heat the gasoline to 200 degrees and run on the fumes. Of course, added the unemployed Wichita aircraft engineer and apartment maintenance man, they might be advised to purchase a reliable fire extinguisher and an extra insurance policy—just in case the [illegible] explodes.

"Gasoline can't be real forgiving. If you miss one time, you won't [illegible] to tell about it," said Novak, [illegible] polyester figure [illegible] [illegible] chandeliers.

[illegible] the beginning of time, [illegible] has spawned a medicine [illegible] who boasted he could make it. Now comes the gas drought [illegible] first, of a [illegible] of [illegible] inventors blowing [illegible] town on the winds of the crunch.

"I don't know what he's talking about," mumbled Tom Eldridge, 30, a baffled management consultant from Arlington who approached Novak during a break to ask what he was talking about.

"I'm lost and I'm not alone."

Eldridge, who admitted to being all thumbs beneath the hood, had been making faces of anguish.

"I thought you had an attitude problem, but I'm glad to see you're really interested in learning," said Novak.

He pointed toward a make-shift air filter stuffed with styrofoam and copper Chore Girl scouring pads, the secret weapon that he feels could make him a folk hero and bring the oil giants, sniveling, to their knees.

It has not been perfected yet, he said, but the styrofoam is supposed to soak up gas poured into the chamber. The Chore Girls are thrown in to prevent a bad fire.

Under the best conditions, the gas vaporizes feeding fumes into the hungry carburetor. Meanwhile, the fuel line has been rerouted through the radiator to heat the gas to 150 degrees, adding further efficiency.

On a bad day, however, improperly vented vapors could accumulate and "blow the hood off the car," winked Novak. "But that won't really hurt you."

One student, he claimed, is cruising 250 miles on a gallon of gas in a Novak-inspired Chevy [illegible]. For $10, he will [illegible] callers and forward diagrams.

Half the predominantly blue collar crowd of mechanics, truck drivers and construction men who did not raise their hands to admit confusion hunched over yellow legal pads and scribbled down every word.

See MILEAGE, B6, Col. 1

[illegible]-a-Gallon Car Is Volatile, Inventor Admits

MILEAGE, From B1

[illegible] but he [illegible] get back [illegible] been there from [illegible] Bill Hardesty, [illegible] school teacher, [illegible] waiting at filling [illegible] Novak's rambling [illegible] a radio talk show several [illegible]

[illegible] salesman [illegible] a former [illegible] the same [illegible] opportunity to [illegible] Novak at $200 a [illegible]

[illegible] one DOE official who [illegible] with Novak, said [illegible] keeps an open mind [illegible] innovation and, he [illegible] hard [illegible] with a better idea.

Novak's ideas were nothing new, said [illegible], simply a compilation of the ideas of others, presented in [illegible] fashion.

EPA officials said such devices might violate antitampering laws [illegible] emission control devices, not to mention the risks of immolation.

"Sure, people think it's a hoax," said an undaunted Novak, a man with a physics degree who has laughed off being laughed at before.

"But this carburetor project could be worth $100 billion. It would cut gas consumption 800 percent. "I get millionaires coming up to me all the time saying, 'If you can prove it works, I'll give you a million . . . to get it off the ground.'"

He hasn't gotten around to it yet. "Engineering is just a hobby to me," he says.

Novak was an unemployed engineer with a checkered career until January, when the gas crunch hit and his lectures at an open university in Kansas began outdrawing the [illegible] class.

He's been barnstorming the Midwest ever since, hawking his "Hundred Mile Per Gallon Seminar" from town to town, waiting for the oil companies to bump him off. "I never thought I'd get to Washington alive," he says.

But energy pioneers have to take a few risks, he says, even if it means filling the old air filter with unleaded and cruising off in a 200-mile-per-gallon time bomb.

"People all over the country are doing this," he says. "It's just plain old mechanics."