



Biodiesel blender John Upton (l) with Jason Askey-Wood at Uptown Biodiesel's Southwark site

Biofuel as a local commodity

Biofuel producers have had a tough time in recent years and none more so than Southwark based Uptown Biodiesel whose journey has certainly not been an easy one.

Uptown Biodiesel, which refuels the taxis of around 200 London cabbies a day and is headed by three directors, John Upton, Nigel Jewison and Jason Askey-Wood, went into biofuel production three years ago. Nigel, in charge of operations, is a passionate Londoner with a mission to help clear London's air said: "Some have described me as a tree hugger but I am truly passionate about this biofuel project. I believe that in collecting local waste and turning it into a local commodity, Uptown Biodiesel is doing something really valuable to help the city and its people."

Collecting London's waste oil

Nigel began his working life in the hospitality trade and, along with the other directors, still has a business delivering ice to some of London's 60,000 hotels and restaurants; it is from these businesses that Uptown Biodiesel collects the waste oil to create its biodiesel. "I was informed that London has around 6000 premature deaths a year as a result of emissions. The biggest emissions come from taxis

which drive slowly around the city 24/7 365 days of the year. Using biodiesel helps solve a cab's black smoke problem. During FON's visit, a line of cabs were waiting to fill up at the small site. One taxi driver told us: "My cab runs better on Nigel's fuel and there's no black smoke coming out of the exhaust. I always refuel here."

Gaining political support

Southwark council initially objected to biodiesel production at the company's premises. "We've had a lot of political support from certain MPs, in particular Labour MP Valerie Shawcross who gave us huge support with our planning application. Plus Simon Hughes, who drives around in a yellow taxi himself which he likes to fill up with our biodiesel and Caroline Lucas, the first Green party MEP, fuelled her campaign bus here," Nigel explained.

"All I want to do is to collect waste oil, turn it into fuel and sell it – properly and safely. This is a frustrating process particularly without proper government support. We've done a lot of lobbying but we're still hampered by legislation - I can't understand why vehicles using biofuels made from recycled waste are not exempt from the congestion charge.

Raising awareness

The work of Uptown Biodiesel has caught the attention of some larger concerns such as PricewaterhouseCoopers. Keen to play its part in reducing the capital's emissions, the company is in talks with Uptown Biodiesel to produce a fuel to power its London Bridge based offices. Jason Askey-Wood, who is responsible for Uptown Biodiesel's finance and marketing, said: "More city companies are looking at the power generation in their buildings which presents additional opportunities for Uptown Biodiesel. Another good promotional opportunity is the 2012 Olympics; London could be doing so much more to reduce emissions and promote itself as a cleaner city before and during this event."

With respect to the physical production of its biodiesel, Uptown Biodiesel has had 'incredible support' from academics at London's South Bank University but the lack of governmental support threatens to halt the company's progress. Jason added: "Taxes could cripple us - as with mineral oils, 60% of our sales price goes to the government. Biodiesel made from a virgin product should be taxed but, if it's recycled like ours, why is it not exempt? We're certainly not the answer to all the problems but I think Uptown Biodiesel deserves more recognition for the part it plays."