

FUEL ECONOMY: High Fuel Prices May Spur Technology

With increasing pressure from government and consumer groups to improve fuel economy, automakers are going to be taking a hard look at what technology is on the shelf and can be implemented in the short term to appease these groups. You might ask, if the technology was sitting on the shelf, why wasn't it implemented before? Automakers and suppliers have been looking at and evaluating a variety of technologies such as higher voltage electrical systems, electronic power steering and others, but it was more fun and more profitable to sell more electronic function in the cockpit in the form of telematics. It was a new word, a new technology, and frankly, a whole new way to make money in selling a new car.

In the auto industry, it's called simply, "shifting gears." Automakers are likely to move quickly to adopt existing technology that will provide a quick solution to better fuel economy. Delphi Automotive Systems, for instance, has been telling the industry for some time that its "stop-start system" called Energen 5 that combines the alternator and starter in a single unit can increase fuel economy by 5%. The system shuts down the engine when it's at idle and restarts it when the accelerator is pressed. It's reported to be quiet, reduces weight, reduces emissions and cuts fuel consumption. Combine this with 42-volt systems that allow the power steering and other mechanical/hydraulic functions to be carried out electrically and there's more fuel to be saved. Look for automakers to begin adopting these technologies as quickly as possible in an effort to thwart heightened regulatory standards on fuel consumption and to re-build traffic in the showroom.