



Summer 2007

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times . . .” When Charles Dickens penned these words in 1857 to begin his novel about the French Revolution, he meant to suggest that these words are always true. But when it comes to the problems that go with the America’s gas guzzling ways, they have never seemed more true than right now.

## *FINALLY, A MAJOR CAFE INCREASE? PROGRESS AND PERIL IN DC*

### Victory in the Senate

After more than 30 years of legislative frustration, fuel efficiency finally won a place at the energy-policy table when the Senate passed its version of HB 6, of which Title V is called the “Ten-in-Ten Fuel Economy Act.” You probably saw the headlines in late June focusing on the bill’s goal of 35 mpg fleet-wide by 2020, but you may not have heard about all the other great things in this bill.

Many observers who have been pushing for meaningful CAFE (“corporate average fuel efficiency”) increases for decades were unimpressed with the relatively modest goal of 35 mpg thirteen years from now, given that America could and would have had a 35 mpg fleet in 2007 had it not been for Detroit’s relentless meddling in the political process.

But it’s important to note a few special features of this bill:

- ❖ The 35 mpg goal is a floor, not a ceiling; fleet mpg is to be “at least” 35 mpg, but must be “the maximum feasible average fuel economy standards” for model years 2011–2019.
- ❖ “Feasibility” often ends up being the rock on which changes that would benefit the environment founder because manufacturers successfully argue that change is too difficult, too expensive or would require lay-offs. So a bill’s definition of “feasibility” is critical to its effectiveness at bringing about change. This bill requires NHTSA to consider “economic practicability,” “the effect of other motor vehicle standards of the Government on fuel economy,” “environmental impacts” and “the need of the United States to conserve energy” in its feasibility analysis. The first of these factors could be used as a brake, but the other three direct prompt action.
- ❖ Trucks and SUVs greater than 8,500 pounds (yes, some people are driving these as passenger vehicles), currently entirely exempt from fuel economy regulations, are brought within the CAFE regulatory structure.
- ❖ NHTSA is required to develop new safety standards to reduce “automobile incompatibility”—that is, the overwhelmingly deadly effect of high, heavy SUVs and pick-ups in side-pact collisions with passenger cars.

- ❖ A new “Fuelstar” program and related marketing campaign to identify vehicles that meet and exceed the average fuel economy standard for their model year. Green stars would identify above-average mpg. Gold stars would go to vehicles attaining 50 mpg or more.
- ❖ The bill’s definition of cost effectiveness does not focus on the costs to automakers of building more fuel-efficient vehicles, but rather the following (quoted from the bill):
  - Economic security
  - The impact of the oil or energy intensity of the US economy on the sensitivity of the economy to oil and other fuel price changes . . .
  - National security, including the impact of US payments for oil and fuel imports on political, economic, and military developments in unstable or unfriendly oil-exporting countries.
  - The uninternalized costs of pipeline and storage oil seepage, and for risk of oil spills from production, handling, and transport, and related landscape damage.
  - The emissions of pollutants including greenhouse gases over the lifecycle of the fuel and the resulting costs to human health, the economy and the environment.

In short, the bill pushes for impacts now fully externalized onto public health, national security and the environment to be taken into account in setting fuel economy standards. We couldn’t have expressed any better the myriad problems with the massive global trade in petroleum, virtually none of which are reflected in the cost of gasoline. It is heartening to know that there are finally enough people in the senate who “get it” and the votes are there to pass legislation this comprehensive and forward-looking. Too bad it probably won’t become the law of the land.

#### Defeat in the House

Right before it broke for recess, the House of Representatives passed its version of the energy bill. The run-up to the vote was accompanied by intense lobbying by the auto industry, whose views have been single-mindedly championed by John Dingell, the longest-serving member of the House of Representatives from Michigan’s 15<sup>th</sup> district. Dingell obtained the seat when his father (also named John Dingell) passed away in 1955 and has held it ever since. The opposition of a single house member would not normally be enough to sink CAFE legislation, but Dingell serves as the chair of . . . you guessed it, the Energy and Commerce Committee. The CAFE increase matching the Senate’s was yanked at the last minute from the complex package. There are pro-environment and pro-conservation provisions in the bill, but the bill’s silence on CAFE standards leaves a huge elephant in the room. To read more about it, click [here](#).

All is not lost, though. The two versions must be reconciled and the CAFE issue will come back to the house in the fall. Now would be a good time to call or e-mail your senators and congressperson and tell them American consumers deserve an energy bill that mandates major increases in the fuel efficiency of passenger vehicles. Find your elected officials’ contact information [here](#).

## MORE FUEL EFFICIENCY NEWS

### MICHIGAN TRANSPORTATION THINKTANK FINDS CAFE INCREASE BENEFITS DETROIT

The University of Michigan 's Transportation Research Institute (UMTRI) found that under the Senate's proposed fuel economy standard of 35 miles per gallon, General Motors, Ford and Chrysler stand to make \$14.4 billion by 2017 – over \$6 billion more than the competition. The study, "The Impact of Attribute-Based Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) Standards on the Automotive Industry," can be found at [www.umtri.umich.edu](http://www.umtri.umich.edu).

### CALIFORNIA IMPLEMENTS GREENHOUSE GAS LAW - OVER DETERMINED OPPOSITION

California is holding workshops and hearings this month on the greenhouse gas (GHG) inventory that is an apparent first step in developing plans to reduce California's GHG output. Meanwhile, the state is seeking a waiver from the federal EPA to allow it to implement its GHG law. The Associated Press reported in early July that that the Bush administration's Transportation Department seemed to be organizing opposition to the waiver among House members and state governors. Meanwhile, the auto industry is ready to fight the GHG law in court if and when the waiver is granted. The EPA administrator, meanwhile, announced that his agency would take no action on the waiver request this year. Read Gov Schwarzenegger's [press release](#) in response.

### TOYOTA PULLS AHEAD OF GM IN FIRST HALF

Toyota overtook GM in worldwide sales to become the world's No 1 automaker in the first quarter of 2007 for the first time ever. GM pulled ahead in the second quarter, but not by enough to save its No 1 spot for the first half. Toyota: 4.72 million units, GM: 4.67 units.

### ANOTHER REASON NOT TO BUY A LAND ROVER

In early August, J D Power and Associates released its annual survey of vehicle reliability. Toyota's Lexus brand, which has dominated the top spot for years, now has a rival in GM's Buick. Meanwhile, Land Rover, while faring better than last year, remains the survey's worst-ranked brand. With fuel efficiency ratings maxing out at 14 city/20 highway for Land Rover's Range Rover brand, we say skip it. The Hummer is most improved in terms of reliability, but gets about the same lousy gas mileage as the Range Rover. And it's so ugly. More info [here](#).

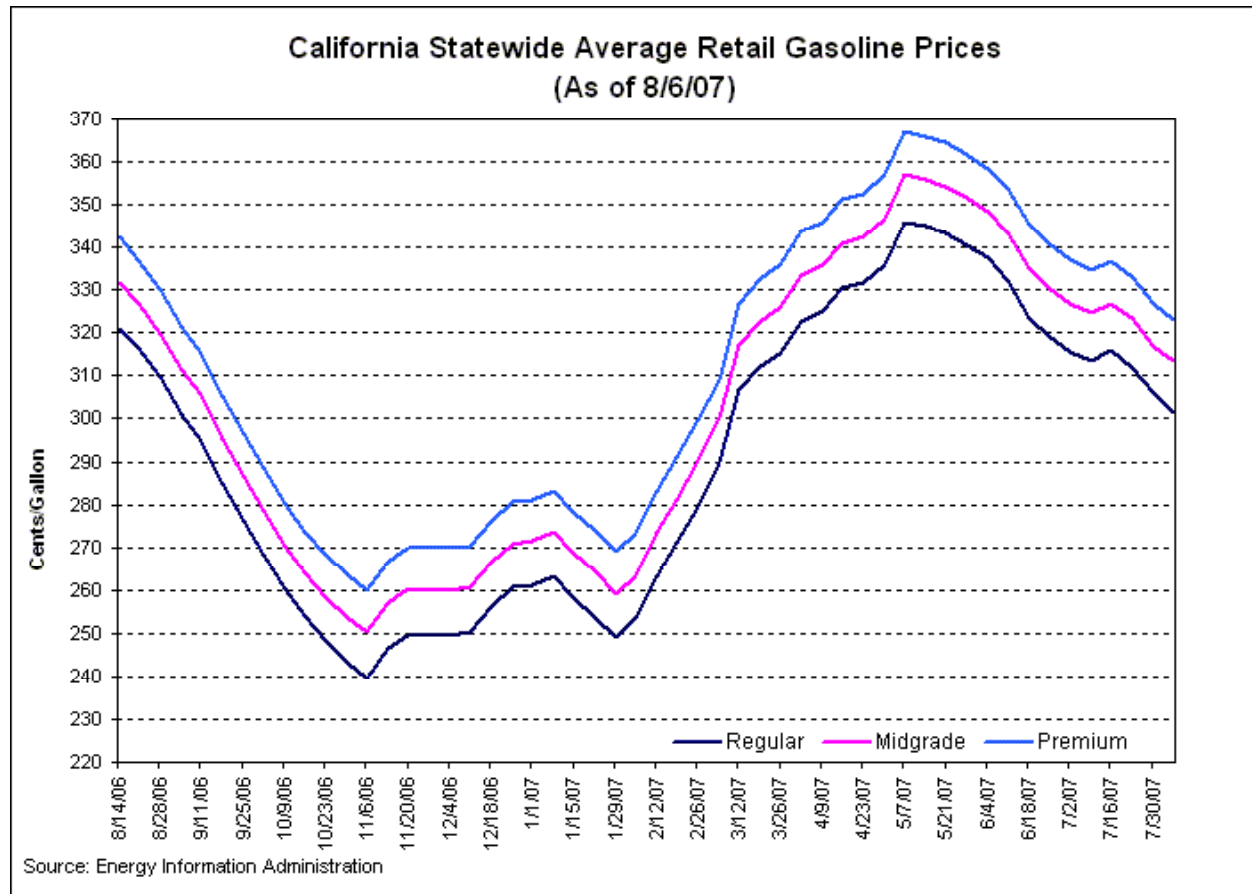
### TOYOTA DEFERS NEXT-GENERATION HYBRIDS

Toyota announced in early August that it would defer the release of a new generation of hybrids using lithium-ion batteries (the Prius now uses nickel-metal-hydride batteries) that were part of its strategy of tripling hybrid sales from 200,000 to 600,000. Lithium-ion batteries have a history of spontaneous combustion—in laptops and other devices—that led Toyota to put off plans to place them in cars. Unfortunately, Toyota also delayed the launch of hybrid versions of its most gas-guzzling vehicles, the Tundra and Sequoia, indefinitely—to the mid-teens at the earliest.

If you would like to write to someone at Toyota to urge them to bring out hybrid models of all vehicle types sooner, try their number one officer in North America:

Mr Jim Press, President and COO  
Toyota Motor Sales, U.S.A., Inc.  
19001 South Western Ave., Dept. WC11  
Torrance, CA 90501

## GAS PRICES UP AND DOWN, BUT MOSTLY UP



For more charts and information on fuel prices, visit California Energy Commission's [website](#).

## GOOD CAR NEWS

### CNN SLIDESHOW: GREENEST, MEANEST VEHICLES OF 2007

Apparently recognizing the growing market for greener vehicles, CNN screened vehicles for greenness and offered their picks. Take a look at CNN's [green vehicle slideshow](#).

### NISSAN JOINS THE "HYBRID CLUB":

Nissan has introduced a [hybrid version](#) of its Altima sedan, supposedly for the 2007 model year. (Has anyone seen one on the road?) Nissan has come a little late to the hybrid party but hopefully will still find a receptive market.

### PROGRESS TOWARD "PLUG-IN HYBRIDS":

Toyota took a concrete step toward marketing plug-in hybrid cars -- vehicles that run mostly on rechargeable batteries and can go 100 miles on a gallon of gas -- when it announced it would provide two specially made Priuses to the University of California for testing on the road in Berkeley and Irvine this fall.

The plug-in hybrid is unknown to most Americans, who are still a little nervous about the regular Prius. But it's old hat to our friends at the Institute for Transportation Studies at UC Davis, who created a 40 mpg Chevy Suburban years ago and now have a [Plug-In Hybrid Vehicle Center](#) and our friend Felix Kramer, founder of the California Cars Initiative ("[Cal Cars](#)"), which promotes plug-in hybrids. Toyota's experimental hybrids will sport two nickel metal battery and require nightly charging. In return, they should make our current generation of hybrids look like guzzlers and current non-hybrid vehicles, well, dinosaurs.

Read the [article](#) in the SF Chronicle.

#### THAT'S ALL GOOD NEWS, BUT WHERE'S OUR HYBRID MINIVAN???

Toyota has offered a hybrid minivan in Japan for years and now says (again) that it will bring a hybrid version of the Sienna minivan to the US market in the next few years. There are even rumors of a Chrysler Town & Country minivan a few years down the road. But DBF feels that families shouldn't have to wait to buy a fuel-efficient family-hauler because the auto companies could be delivering them to the market TODAY.

Please sign our [petition](#) to the automakers if you haven't already done so. By the way, the Union of Concerned Scientists has a [hybrid-minivan petition](#) going too. Why not sign theirs too?

## *SAFETY NEWS*

#### TOYOTA OFFERS WEBSITE TO TEACH TEENS DRIVER SAFETY

This site features advanced graphics and tough quiz questions – good for parents too. <http://www.toyotateedriver.com/>

#### WASHINGTON STATE BANS DWT (DRIVING WHILE TEXTING)

Washington has become the first state to ban texting while driving. This year, nine states have considered legislation to ban driving while texting (DWT), but five decided to wait for more conclusive evidence that DWT poses a risk requiring special legislation.

DWT in Washington State comes with a \$101 fine. The legislation easily passed after a 53-year-old trucker checking e-mail caused a five-car pileup on I-5. More about Washington's ban [here](#).

#### FATALITY RATE DROPS

Transportation Secretary Mary Peters reported in late July that in 2006, 42,642 people died in traffic crashes, down 868 deaths from 2005. That 2% drop led to a historic low fatality rate of 1.42 per 100 million vehicle miles traveled, Peters said. Read [more](#).

## DON'T BE FUELED! NEWS IN BRIEF

DBF has been awarded a \$5000 grant to develop a high school car-buying curriculum for teens stressing safety and environmental responsibility.

DBF is once again an all-volunteer organization, a situation we hope will be temporary as we would like to staff our efforts consistently. If you would like to help with fund-raising or grantwriting, we would love to talk to you!

DONATIONS GREATLY APPRECIATED. If you would like to help fuel our efforts, we would truly appreciate and make good use of your donation now. Remember, we are the only "gasroots" organization devoted solely to fuel efficiency and family-friendly fuel-efficient vehicles. We have a new fiscal sponsor, MarinLink. Please make your check out to **MarinLink/DBF** and mail it to:

Don't Be Fueled! mothers for clean and safe vehicles  
The Presidio of San Francisco  
PO Box 29138  
San Francisco, CA 94129-0138

Or visit our completely secure donation page on our website, <http://www.dontbefueled.org/>.

*With our thank-you note to you, you will receive a wonderful, premium organic tea bag as a special thank you from us!* The tea has been donated by DBF friends Jill Portman and Gary Shinner, the owners of [Mighty Leaf Tea](#), our very favorite tea company, and is a real treat.



In our next issue, we will cover the 2008 model year cars, SUVs and minivans. Please e-mail us your impressions, test drive reports and comments. Also, please write us with tips, suggestions and stories you would like to share (but please no investment opportunities, body enhancements, prescription drugs and lottery wins). ☺

**Subscribing To Our Newsletter.** If a friend has sent this newsletter to you and you've found it interesting, please take a moment to [subscribe](#) on our website to join our private e-mail list. The newsletter comes out two to three times a year. We're hoping for four in 2008!

Wishing you safe holiday and back-to-school driving from the DBF Team,

Betsy, Cindy, Denise, Eva, Janie, Lauren, Lynn and Sandy