

## Limousine owner gives the environment a lift

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Chris

Stephens/The Plain Dealer Steve Qua, 49, is doing his part for the environment. It's something his corporate customers are going to expect if he wants their business.

### **GREEN INC.**

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### **The greening of Company Car & Limousine**

1. Reduce idling.
2. Drive the speed limit.
3. Recycle bottles and papers.
4. Inflate tires with nitrogen.
5. Test a vehicle that can run on propane.
6. Offset carbon emissions.

Company Car & Limousine has joined the green revolution, but don't expect owner Steve Qua to send out a fleet of hybrids anytime soon.

Having operated traditional vehicles in Cleveland since 1994, Qua has provided his customers with a level of comfort a Toyota Prius can't provide.

At least not yet.

The majority of hybrids are just too small, he said, and the others don't get good enough gas mileage on the highway, where 95 percent of Company Car's miles are logged.

Perhaps the next generation will work out better, he said.

Until then, Qua has found plenty of other ways to hug the planet.

"Now that the weather is changing, we're instituting a no-idle policy," said Qua, offering one example. An exception, of course, would be on scorchingly hot days when a car can turn into an oven.

"We need to have five minutes to cool the car down," he said. "But we don't need to have an hour to cool the car down."

Limo operators with a green bent are becoming increasingly common, and that means figuring out not just what they can do, but what they can afford to do, said Patricia Nelson, executive director of the National Limousine Association,

Ultimately, Qua expects his big corporate clients to demand a green profile from their ground transportation provider, so he's getting prepared.

"It has not yet been a buying decision," he said, "but it will be."

Qua, who has 28 vehicles, including a diesel-powered bus, hired Toronto-based Green Ride Global to audit his business and provide an inventory of its greenhouse gas emissions. The result was a plan to improve fuel efficiency and reduce waste throughout the company. All those bottles of water VIPs gulp down are now being recycled, helping to cut Company Car's solid waste in half, he said.

Qua even shelled out about \$3,000 to offset the carbon emissions of his fleet for a year. That's about 900 metric tons. The money went to an Indiana dairy farm that captures the methane gas emanating from the manure of some 3,700 cows. Methane is a potent greenhouse gas, and smelly to boot.

Rather than being pumped into an exposed retention pond, the manure is funneled into a tank where it stews for 21 days at 104 degrees Fahrenheit. The methane then powers a generator that creates electricity for the Bos Dairy farm, about an hour south of Lake Michigan.

The offsets were purchased from the Chicago Climate Exchange, which promotes environmentally sound projects that have been investigated and deemed legitimate.

While the offsets are part of Company Car's overall plan, they do not represent the primary goal, said Green Ride Global President Justin Raymond. It's more important to reduce emissions and cut waste at the source, he said. That means training drivers about how to conserve fuel, whether it's sticking to the speed limit or keeping tires properly inflated.

A car owner can reduce fuel consumption by 4 to 10 percent simply by keeping the right amount of air in a vehicle's tires, Raymond said. Qua ultimately plans to fill his tires with pure nitrogen, as opposed to compressed air, which is only 78 percent nitrogen.

Simply speaking, nitrogen molecules are larger than those of oxygen and therefore leak less, Raymond said. That results in optimal tire pressure for longer periods of time. Professional racers such as those in NASCAR and the Indy Racing League use nitrogen.

And while Qua isn't prepared to add hybrids to his fleet, he is getting close to retrofitting one of his vehicles with a kit that modifies the intake manifold to accept both propane and gasoline. Propane burns 50 percent cleaner than gas, Qua said, but is only about 80 percent as efficient. Propane also is about \$1 a gallon cheaper at current rates.

Qua expects to test such a vehicle soon to see what kind of gas mileage it gets and how it handles.

Change has come faster in other parts of the country, especially Southern California. A company in Santa Monica called Eco Limo operates a fleet of 17 vehicles that use alternative fuels, and, incidentally, none has an American nameplate. Owner Y Fray began her service a few years ago with a single black Prius and an intimate knowledge of the streets of Los Angeles.

"My mom thought I was nuts," she said.

But then her first client materialized, a businessman who needed a ride to work twice a week. Then came a doctor who needed a regular lift, followed by a woman involved with commercial lending at General Motors Corp.

All of a sudden, Fray was in business. Then came her high-profile delivery of Leonardo DiCaprio to the Oscars in 2005. Demand picked up even more. Eco Limo went from sales of \$110,000 in 2005 to \$550,000 in 2006 to \$1.4 million in 2007.

Fray, 50, said she doesn't purport to make a lot of money, "but I feel really good about what I'm doing."

Qua, in his own way, is doing his part, too.