

Veggie-Fueled Road Trip

Last year, Dartmouth's ultimate Frisbee team needed a way to get to their competitions...and the environmentally conscious group came up with a green idea.

(Rubens) We discovered you could buy a school bus on eBay...which was kind of shocking... then a few people mentioned oh did you realize you can run a bus on waste vegetable oil...we started doing research about that...eventually it became a lot of questions of could we do this?...and eventually we figured out a lot of answers were yes we could

That's Craig Rubens, one of the original members of The BIG GREEN BUS...what started as a fun and environmentally friendly way for Dartmouth's ultimate Frisbee team to travel has transformed into a larger mission to drive from New Hampshire to the west coast and back, educating the public about alternative fuels along the way.

(Ambience) Fire crackling

I met up with this year's group on a July stop in a rustic cabin nestled in the mountains near Lake Tahoe in Northern California, where I spent 24 hours with them to find out about life on a veggie powered bus.

(Ambience) People laughing

Although the mechanics of converting a bus to run on grease may sound difficult...they told me otherwise...they found instructions on the Internet and Rubens said almost anyone can convert their personal vehicle.

(Ambience) Sound of someone tinkering with tools

(Rubens) You can buy kits, it's kind of like a little project that you do, you just order a kit, it comes with everything you need, down to the individual nuts and bolts, and it's kind of something anyone who's comfortable opening up the hood of their car and using a wrench could do in a weekend

Although the mechanics was the easy part...finding the money for the project...proved a bit more difficult. Vivian Savath, the financial coordinator, explains how they managed to get sponsorship from big name companies such as Newman's Own and Whole Foods.

(Savath) Basically just starting cold calling...we kind of pitched it as a marketing opportunity to them... must have sent out over a hundred letters, once we got Newman's on board it kind of lent more legitimacy to what we were doing

The group raised 45,000 dollars. With the money they paid for their meals, the bus and the costs of transforming it into a home on wheels

One thing they didn't have to pay for was much of the fuel that helped them travel across the United States. Whenever the group needs to refuel, instead of filling up at gas stations, they fan out to local restaurants on a mission to find quality used grease.

(Ambience) Sound of grease sizzling.

Andrew Zabel told me about the curious responses the group often receives during the refueling process.

(Zabel) Walk into a restaurant, tell the manager, excuse me I have an odd request, do you have a dumpster out back with the waste vegetable oil from your fries? At first they are very perplexed, and they're not sure if this is scam, you say no no.... I have a bus and it doesn't run on diesel it actually runs on waste vegetable oil... and the real moment of conversion for them is when you actually drop the hose into the dumpster put the other end into your gas tank...and they're like woah.

Don't be fooled.... Melissa Lynch explains the process of gathering 120 gallons of grease needed to fill the bus's fuel tank...is not always pleasant.

(Lynch) The dumpsters have just been sitting there and they have grease hanging in stalactite form from them, or it just, you touch them and you're instantly covered in sticky black stuff that you just can't get off

The group stays in one place for only a couple days at a time before moving on to their next destination....and another opportunity to share their thoughts on veggie power.

(Ambience) Sound of the bus moving.

While veggie oil works for the Big Green Bus, Hendrickson says it's not a viable option for everyone. He told me his idea for a more permanent alternative to fossil fuels.

(Hendrickson) I think that the ultimate trick will be having a general energy system where you can take a little bit from this resource and a little bit from that resource and kind of distribute our load so that each of the individual resources has a chance to replenish it's self rather than currently when we are just depleting one

You can follow the Big Green Bus journey online...at
www.TheBigGreenBus.org....

(Ambience) Sound of the bus

The Web site features pod casts and the group's schedule for the rest of this summer's road trip. For Intern Edition I'm Maja Cholody in Los Angeles.