

## **A Short History of Gasoline vs. Alcohol Fuel (Ethanol)**

*by David Blume*

The first cars, back in the late 1800s, ran primarily on alcohol. It was the only reliable, combustible fuel that was available. Oil had already been discovered, but it had a completely different use at that time; it was used for heating and lighting homes. So the part that they couldn't use for heating and lighting—the stuff that wanted to explode and nobody wanted to put in an oil lamp—they threw away. John D. Rockefeller did some experimentation and found out that, although it didn't do such a good job of it, it would run a car, too. And he started selling it at dirt-cheap prices in the cities, where he had his oil distribution business.

So gasoline was an industrial waste byproduct that was marketed as an alternative to the standard fuel, which was alcohol.

The big proponent of alcohol in cars was Henry Ford. He thought that alcohol was the very best fuel for cars—it was clean, it was efficient, and there were a lot more stills in this country than gas stations. So Ford and Rockefeller fought tooth and nail over what was going to be the nation's fuel supply, until Rockefeller decided not to play fair anymore.

Rockefeller gave the Women's Christian Temperance Union four million dollars to lobby Congress with. That would be like four hundred million dollars today, and, yes, you can buy Congress for that. And so they passed Prohibition. You probably thought it had something to do with drinking and moral decay. But can you imagine an all-male Congress voting to keep working men from drinking? So for 13 years alcohol went off the market as a fuel, as an industrial product that used to compete with many oil products, and for drinking also.

After they make everything they call valuable out of oil—plastics, drugs, pesticides, industrial chemicals—everything's that left over is dumped into the gasoline. So on any given day there are 400 toxic chemicals dumped into gasoline, and those might not necessarily be the same chemicals the next day. It's whatever's left over.

So gasoline is the biggest toxic waste disposal system in the world, and it's in the open, and it's legal! They're able to use our cars to spew their toxic waste back into the air. And they make something like \$2500 from a barrel of oil, for the industrial chemicals, and something like \$100 a barrel from the gasoline, and they don't care if they made zero, because they get rid of all their toxic waste.

*David Blume is the author of the "brilliant," "delightful," "most comprehensive and authoritative," new book, *Alcohol Can Be a Gas: Fueling an Ethanol Revolution for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. He is the executive director of the International Institute for Ecological Agriculture, and has been an alcohol fuel pioneer since the seventies.*

*He has consulted for a wide array of clients, including governments, farmers, and companies interested in turning waste into valuable and profitable products. He presents a plan for producing alcohol fuel as a sustainable substitute for oil-based products, while producing food, cleaning the air and improving the soil. For excerpts from the book, and much more information on alcohol fuel, see [www.alcoholcanbeagas.com](http://www.alcoholcanbeagas.com). This article has been provided courtesy of the Green Living Journal, a project of the Center for Holistic Ecology and the Cumberland Green Bioregional Council.*