

# Thousands spent on a fuel-saving device 'that does not work'

## EXCLUSIVE

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A COMPANY based at Kent University which developed a device that purported to reduce the amount of fuel a vehicle uses has folded amid claims that its technology does not work.

Oil Drum Ltd was given a £20,000 prize for winning the 2008 Kent Innovation Challenge and rent-free accommodation at the Enterprise Hub, based at the university, which also owned 10 per cent of the company.

It produced a device which could be fitted to vehicles and was designed to lower the amount of fuel engines use by adding hydrogen to them and thus making them 10 per cent more efficient.

However, tests carried out by the BBC have concluded that it doesn't work and instead served to make vehicles four per cent less efficient. Oil Drum insists the tests were flawed and too short.

Kent University had been involved with Oil Drum, but is now attempting to distance itself from the firm, which no longer occupies space at the university.

The university admits that it donated accommodation to the firm and owned 10 per cent of it. University staff also appeared on the promotional video on Oil Drum's website.

However, at least one company which bought a licence to manufacture the technology has lost money.

Andel, a Yorkshire based leak detection system company, bought a licence to make the gen-



One of the devices attached to a truck

erators. It says its dealings with Oil Drum have cost it £500,000.

Ian Pogson, of Andel, told the Gazette that it took somewhere between four and eight to weeks before he concluded the product didn't work.

He said: "On first impressions it looked OK, robust and reasonably well made but there were some real howlers."

"The product rapidly overheated so it spent most of its time shut down for cooling – probably 50 to 75 per cent of the time. If this was so, how could its performance (fuel saving) be quantified?"

Andel says that one of the main reasons it was persuaded to consider the Oil Drum fuel-saving generator was that it appeared to have the backing of Kent University.

Indeed, Winston Waller a senior lecturer in electronic engineering at the university was shown endorsing Oil Drum and its product on the company's corporate video.

He was filmed saying: "The university has got a green agenda and we are involved in a number of projects across the whole energy efficiency area."

"This project ticks those boxes.

It involves electronics, should improve efficiency of transport, reduce emissions into the atmosphere. It does line up well with our agenda."

Mr Waller is one a number of people who had dealings with Oil Drum and who didn't respond to questions put to them by the Gazette this week.

Oil Drum has stated in the past that it was "working in partnership" with the university.

The Gazette asked the university what the nature of that relationship was. Its spokesman Gary Hughes replied: "Oil Drum rented premises within the business hatchery facility from us and engaged students to work on a supervised electronics project."

"An initial promotional video, part of the Innovation Challenge prize, included comments from the academic who supervised the student project."

"Although the university was awarded a 10 per cent minority shareholding in the company it had no control over the company and did not sit on its board."

■ The BBC's programme about Oil Drum is on BBC1 South East at 1pm on Sunday and is called University Challenged.

## Test was too short, boss claims

DARRYL Watts, who had been the managing director of Oil Drum, insists there is nothing wrong with the hydrogen generator his firm developed.

He says the BBC's tests were flawed and not carried out for long enough. "The test was too short and on the occasion when they did the test our unit did not work."

"But we have had positive results over much longer periods of time. We had a test run over 10,000 miles which did show a positive fuel increase."

"We have response from various customers, including Sainsbury's, who used it and found it to their benefit."

Mr Watts, of Chestfield Road, Chestfield, said Oil Drum had had to fold due to financial problems. Its website, www.save-

fuel.co.uk, now shows the address and phone number of a firm of bailiffs in Ilford Essex.

Mr Watts said legal battles about Oil Drum's intellectual property and the resulting costs had forced the company to close. "We were only a small firm and the decision was taken to manage the closure of the business," Mr Watts told the Gazette yesterday (Wednesday).

"We were too small to continue defending the intellectual property action. The cost was too high."

Oil Drum was established in 2006 and won the 2008 Kent Innovation Challenge, earning it a £20,000 cash prize.

It ceased to be a resident at Kent University in March this year and ceased operating in April.



Darryl Watts

## 'Documentary is fair and impartial'

THE gadget Oil Drum invented was called an on-demand hydrogen generator. Oil Drum said the generator "enables internal combustion engines to run more efficiently by adding hydrogen to regular fuel".

It admits the science behind the generator is not new but says it was "the first company to put together a portable, reliable, safe and efficient system that will work with any internal combustion engine regardless of the type of fuel".

Oil Drum has been reported as saying that a generator fitted to a commercial vehicle could make it 10 per cent more efficient.

For its documentary, which

is broadcast on Sunday afternoon, the BBC carried out a test on the generator at Millbrook Proving Ground in Bedfordshire

The test concluded that far from being 10 per cent more efficient, it was four per cent less efficient – results that the BBC is standing by.

### Highest standards

Reporter Vince Rogers said: "Millbrook testing ground is a reputable organisation with the highest standards. Our documentary is as fair and impartial as you would expect from the BBC."

And Dr Colin Brown, director of engineering at

the Institution of Mechanical Engineers in London, also has his doubts about how the generator would work.

He says in the film: "From what I've watched here, it doesn't say anything about where the power comes from."

"It starts with a battery, well something has to power the battery and at the moment off the truck that gets powered off the engine."

"So you are into this very circular argument early on that the engine runs, charges the battery, generates the hydrogen and it runs the engine that charges the battery. It's not obvious to me where the wheel is in that situation."

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