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Environmental Nonsense

by Scott McPherson

The environmentalist movement has gone into overdrive over the newest trend in Sport Utility Vehicles (SUVs). The Hummer, from General Motors, Ford's Excursion, and now the Unimog from DaimlerChrysler are all driving our Green friends to distraction distraction because they have attained a new low in "excessive" gas consumption.

Labeled "gas-guzzlers" and scathingly dishonored with the "Exxon Valdez Award for Environmental Destruction," large SUVs have become the most hated symbol of American affluence and of our alleged collective disregard for "delicate" Mother Earth. The crusade against SUVs has even taken on religious connotations with the "What Would Jesus Drive?" campaign. This is fitting, for a near-spiritual fervor certainly possesses the worshippers of the environmentalist movement.

So what exactly is the nature of the Greens' latest complaint?

It is that trucks such as the Hummer, Excursion, and Unimog are being allowed to skirt the current Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards of 27.5 miles per gallon (mpg) that apply to other passenger vehicles, because they are so large that they are actually being regulated as Light-Duty Trucks (LDTs). As a result, they must meet a lower standard of 20.7 mpg. Our friends in the Green squads want large SUVs to fall under the higher 27.5 mpg regulation.

It should be stated from the outset that, shallow as it is, our Green friends do make a valid point: Why should some automobile manufacturers get a pass on the fuel consumption rules that apply to everyone else? It isn't fair, they say, for car makers to be rewarded just because they've built something *so big* that it falls outside of normal vehicle regulatory guidelines.

Hear, hear.

Of course, the Greens refuse to acknowledge the role that their own lobbying for CAFE standards had in creating a loophole large enough to drive a Hummer through.

And, truth be told, environmentalists aren't really that happy with the 27.5 mpg rule. If they had their way, it would actually be raised to somewhere in the neighborhood of 40 mpg, which would have us all driving cars the approximate size of a shoebox. Like their leftist allies in the gun-control

movement, however, they know better than to tip their hand too soon. Closing the LDT loophole and bringing SUVs under a tighter reign will suffice — for now.

But rather than expend energy complaining about the special treatment given to large SUVs, why do the Greens tolerate any CAFE standards at all?

Think of it: If it's bad to have a car or truck that uses more than one gallon of gasoline for every 27.5 miles driven, that can only be because driving is by definition bad. Burning gasoline is harmful to the environment — period — which is why environmentalists want you to do less of it.

Environmentalists, to be true to their cause, ought to have the courage to call it the way they see it. They want higher standards because, to them, every ounce of gas consumed over their arbitrarily set limit is an affront to every living species.

So they should oppose driving — period.

Well, they'll counter, we're not extremists! We just want sensible regulations that raise awareness and cut down on pollution.

Okay, but what's so special about the level — we'll go with the 27.5 mpg standard, for the sake of simplicity — that you yourselves have approved? Why not go ahead and push for a 40, 50, 60, or 100 mpg average for fuel consumption, effective right now?

*Better yet, why not demand that **no** amount of pollution be allowed to emit from the tail pipe of **any** automobile?*

According to the environmentalists' own rhetoric, the chief goal is to raise CAFE standards for all personal vehicles. This means that, for the Greens, the value that personal automobiles bring to human life is dependent on their using the lowest amount of fuel. That's why they have so perfected the high moral tone and knowing scowl that accompanies their most pejorative stamp: gas-guzzler.

If less fuel consumption is good, then *no* fuel consumption would be *ideal*. Why not ban driving altogether?

For a few on the radical fringe, the idea of banning cars is probably appealing, but more likely the Green movement opts for setting arbitrary economy standards because the thought of giving up driving is every bit as unrealistic for the rank-and-file environmentalist as it is for any proud owner of the Earth Destroyer 2000 with a built-in ozone-depletion system. It's far easier to drive a car that gets better gas mileage than your neighbor's — and sneer at him. This sure helps environmentalists to feel better about themselves, but it doesn't get us any closer to defining why we bother with CAFE standards.

At the same time, the Greens wouldn't even think of placing these same regulations on commuter busses or tractor-trailer rigs. Why? Because these supposedly serve a "greater good," another subjective and indefinable standard. Busses carry "many" passengers, while big rigs transport food and other needed products. For them, then, a pass is allowed without protest.

Still, the same philosophical queries can apply. For example, how many people, exactly, does a bus have to carry to justify a (drastically) lower fuel economy, and more important, by what objective standard can we reach this conclusion?

If a bus is carrying only four or five people, that would make even the Hummer a model of fuel efficiency by comparison. Green types will say that busses supply a net benefit to the environment because they transport people who would otherwise drive, so that we have to compute the amount of fuel that would be consumed if each of those passengers were instead in a car.

The trouble is, people who take the bus are typically poor and can't afford a car — that's why they're riding the bus. Were it not for busses, then, they'd probably walk or ride a bike, consuming absolutely no gasoline whatsoever. Busses, it could be argued, might actually do more “harm” than “good.”

Such examples of arbitrariness in environmental “standards” could be cited ad infinitum. They should be abolished immediately. We live in a country founded on the principle that government exists to protect individual rights — not set individual fuel consumption standards.

The proper role for government with respect to pollution is to provide the forum in which pollution concerns can be addressed, *as they affect individual human beings*, and to settle these disputes in a manner consistent with upholding the *defined and definable* rights of individual citizens. Of course, in an ideal world, there would be [private ownership of roads](#), which, while still leaving externalities such as air pollution to be resolved, would make other matters currently subject to government regulation, such as seat belts and air bags, simply private matters between the owner and the consumer.

SUV hatred is not about fuel consumption — it's about hypocrisy, activism, envy, and control, none of which offer a sound standard for establishing laws in a free society.

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