

A stepping stone to sustainability

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To make big changes, sometimes you have to start with small steps. Alexander Beerts, founder of Blue Planet Energy, is one man who subscribes to this philosophy.

[F088 Image 1](#)

Alexander Beerts has a clear goal for his company: Belgium's Blue Planet Energy is to become a market leader in delivering clean renewable energy solutions worldwide. Alexander wants to face gigantic geopolitical and environmental challenges head on.

After spending the last few months recovering from an operation on his leg, he knows exactly how important it is to take a slow, step-by-step approach if you want to get somewhere.

Alexander started Blue Planet Energy in 2006 after having sold his construction business. It's a holding company that he uses to invest in other sustainable transport projects, including biogas initiatives in Belgium, Canada and Germany. Last year he also started a subsidiary, Blue Planet Solar, which focuses solely on photovoltaic solar energy technology.

Tropical

So, given his in depth knowledge of a range of sustainable mobility solutions, is Alexander any nearer the answer to that eternal question: what is going to be the fuel of the future for vehicles?

Well, definitely not solar, Alexander jokes. If you covered the whole surface of a car you could maybe use it to power your air conditioning, he says.

"Renewable fuels will very much depend on the region, such as ethanol in the tropical regions and biogas in Scandinavia. There'll not be a universal fuel," says Alexander.

Stepping stone vehicle

However, he does have high hopes for hydrogen, provided it's produced sustainably. One of his subsidiaries, Blue Planet Hydrogen (can you spot the theme in his company names?), is currently working a project that typifies his step-by-step philosophy. It will involve just two vehicles – adapted Opel Combos – operating in Antwerp and Brussels for a period of three months.

For the past two years, Blue Planet Hydrogen has been, in cooperation with its scientific partner Technical University of Antwerpen Karel de Grote, adapting the software and electronics of the Opel Combo with a compressed natural gas (CNG) engine to drive on one hundred per cent pure hydrogen.

[F088 Image 2](#)

But Alexander stresses that, due to the lack of the necessary infrastructure in both cities, the car will be a multi-fuel vehicle able to run on petrol as well.

“We see it as a stepping stone vehicle because of the lack of filling stations,” he says.

Direct marketing

The vehicle is now ready for a trial; in fact two of them are ready to hit the roads in January or February 2010. The contracts haven't been signed yet so he can't identify the companies that will use them, but he hints that two major organisations operating in logistics and retail will road-test the vehicles.

“We've offered them a test period to use this one hundred per cent hydrogen vehicle in a real-life situation as one of their fleet,” he says.

Alexander believes going directly to companies is the best way forward because, for them, one vehicle isn't crucial. Furthermore, large corporations are under immense pressure to reduce their carbon footprints and are looking to adopt greener practices.

Prospects

“We'll have problems, we'll have breakdowns and we'll have failures. The companies are aware of this, but we have a team of engineers available all the time to get the vehicle back on the road and to learn from the mistakes. If the trial is successful, we may increase the number of vehicles, step by step,” says Alexander.

We hope to get back in touch with Alexander in a few months time to see how these first few steps have gone.