

Greenfuel

Is the incentive of a significantly reduced fuel bill enough to make you consider a green alternative to petrol and diesel?

One of the first businesses to take advantage of the Incubation facility at the Innovation Centre was *Greenfuel*, who moved into the centre in February 2003 and started trading in October. Dedicated to promoting the uptake of LPG (liquefied petroleum gas) as a green alternative to petrol and diesel, *Greenfuel* primarily trades through its online presence.

Ingram Legge is one of the directors: "The first LPG conversions became available during the fuel crisis of the 1970s, but failed to become a popular alternative for a number of reasons, including ready availability of the fuel and unproven technology. Today, however, the incentives for converting your car to LPG are manifest – the technology has come of age, and the government is incentivising the take-up of LPG through lower fuel duty and a number of grant schemes.

"LPG vehicles are becoming far more popular – the number has risen from 3,500 in 1998 to over 100,000 in 2003 – and the cost benefits for a typical two litre Vauxhall Astra estate include a government grant of £780 towards the conversion, in addition

to the ongoing savings in the cost of fuel," he says.

There are now more than 1,400 LPG refuelling stations nationwide, and forecourt prices are around 50 per cent of those of petrol and diesel. Larger organisations – such as businesses and local authorities – can have LPG stored at their premises, which can lower the cost to as little as 21p per litre.

Ingram continues: "*Greenfuel* believes 'convert the driver and the car will follow' and to this end we provide a one stop shop for advice and information about LPG. Using a database of 46,000 vehicles, the *Greenfuel* website will provide an instant quote for an LPG conversion, and also details how much could be saved every year together with any other incentives – such as a grant or exemption from the London congestion charge – that may be available depending on the car.

"The Innovation Centre has enabled us to get trading because there are no distractions from our core activity; we moved in and could immediately set about the planning and research we needed to do before we started trading.



Ingram Legge (r) and Noel Lock

We now directly employ four people and have a national network of fully trained and qualified LPG conversion installers – and we benefit from help and advice from both the centre management and the other diverse and innovative businesses that occupy Carpenter House," concludes Ingram.

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Informal chats can prove a fount of advice

experienced entrepreneurs through the mentoring scheme, which matches the mentor with the most relevant experience to the new business."

Formal, four-monthly reviews are one of the key aspects of this culture of support. Led by a panel of business people, the reviews encourage each venture to discuss its strategy and operations, as well as identify skills and resource gaps. The objective of each review is to provide advice and direction, however they also allow the progress of each new business to be monitored – if a venture simply has no hope of trading in the commercial world, they are asked to leave the centre to free up a space for another entrepreneur to benefit.

The Incubation facility differs from SETsquared in that it has been established to help businesses take their first steps as trading companies in their own right. Currently nine businesses are benefiting from the resources on offer at the centre. They range from a company working in

the field of biometrics to the New Academy of Business – an institution encouraging companies and individuals to explore topics such as corporate responsibility, business and human rights and socially responsible investment.

SETsquared is a joint venture between the Universities of Bath, Bristol, Southampton and Surrey, and was established with a grant from the Higher Education Innovation Fund. Bath SETsquared opened in September 2003 and while the Incubation facility is geared towards nurturing businesses in the early stage of their trading life, SETsquared aimed at helping entrepreneurs make that vital, yet often difficult move from initial ideas to business start-up.

Currently, five ventures are making most of the support and advice available at the SETsquared centre: a local-to-national online help shop; an engineering project that's researching a high mobility vehicle for people with disabilities; a mobile phone applications developer