

Fairfield man crafts a plug-in Toyota

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Fairfield resident James Boncek, 26, has converted his 1993 Toyota Tercel into an all-electric vehicle with the help of Stamford's MXenergy. Boncek said he spent the past five months replacing the gas engine on the Tercel, which he bought for \$100 in 2004. (Phil Noel/Staff photo)

To do his part for the environment, James Boncek of Fairfield has turned his 1993 Toyota Tercel into an all-electric vehicle with the help of Stamford-based power marketer MXenergy.

"It all begins with awareness of your actions and understanding what we do really matters," said Boncek, 26, who gained an awareness of vehicle emissions as a graduate from New England Technical Institute. "I know what comes out of the tailpipe and how it affects our environment."

Boncek said he spent the past five months replacing the gas engine on the Tercel, which he bought for

\$100 in 2004 with about 150,000 miles on the odometer, with an electric motor that runs off of two 12-volt batteries under the hood and 10 12-volt batteries in the



trunk.

"The real goal is not for me just to have an electric car and be green, but to show the rest of the world that having a green car is possible," he said. "The car has a great chassis on it and a new heart, so it'll go for another 200,000 miles. It's a complete recycle."

The vehicle, which has a top speed of about 70 miles per hour, can drive for about 50 miles before needing a six-to-eight-hour charge from the power grid, said Boncek, who works as the technical director for the Fairfield Theatre Company.

"It's pennies on the dollar in comparison to gas," he said, adding that his special Tercel does not need tune-ups, oil changes, spark plugs or any new parts associated with a gas engine. "There's very little maintenance to an electric car."

The conversion, which cost about \$10,000, would have not been possible without sponsorship from MXenergy, which also lends its support to the theater company, Boncek said.

"I had a very good working relationship with MXenergy, so I asked them for help," he said. "They

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were excited to be involved in this project."

MXenergy has given a "sizeable donation" to Boncek's conversion project because his electric vehicle serves as a way to educate the public on energy efficiency and responsible care of the environment, said Paul Lavella, MXenergy's marketing director, citing the Fairfield man's "environmental commitment."

The company, which provides natural gas and electric power in 39 areas throughout North America, recently initiated an MXenergy Wizard program in Michigan to offer rebates on insulation and other energy savers in exchange for home energy audits.

"We're getting a lot of interest because people are realizing the paybacks can be very dramatic," Lavella said.

The manufacture and use of electric vehicles greatly reduces U.S. dependence on foreign oil while preventing carbon monoxide emissions, said Bob Rice, president of the New England Electric Auto Association in Killingworth, who turned his 1989 Volkswagen into an electric car.

"Why can't all the big car companies do the same thing?" he said, adding that consumers can get electricity from the sun if they really want to go green. "Global warming is a real thing."

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