



CAFÉ Real or Unrealized

Gary Stamberger – Training Director
Magnaflow Exhaust Products

Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFÉ) has been a part of the automotive landscape for over 30 years. It has, either through the written word or interpretation, affected our industry in more ways than most realize. In an effort to comply with this Federal regulation new vehicle manufacturers compromised performance, styling and safety. According to many watchdog groups, we can directly attribute 2000 traffic fatalities a year to CAFÉ regulations as a result of smaller, lighter, less responsive vehicles. Furthermore, if we are to believe that the primary purpose of CAFÉ was to reduce our overall fuel consumption and therefore our dependence on foreign oil, then we can only conclude that it is a dismal failure (refer to chart). The reason for this is defined by Vehicle Miles Traveled or VMT's. As cars became more economical, any gains made in MPG per vehicle were offset by putting more cars on the road and driving many more miles.



The good news... we have lived through the worst part of it. When CAFÉ along with Emission Standards hit the industry the technology did not exist to accomplish these lofty goals. The first catalytic converters of the 70's and early 80's, worked much harder than the units on today's cars. The early cars were still carbureted for the most part and computers were in their infancy. As we progressed into the 90's fuel injection had replaced carburetion, the computers were processing a good deal of information and we were beginning to head in the right direction.

What is interesting to note here is that in the time period between 1990 and 2010 Emissions Regulations continued to get tighter while CAFÉ standards remained unchanged at 27.5 mpg. Prior to that, it had gone up almost every year between 1978 and 1989.

In the coming years, as we look back over the history of this industry, 1996 will indeed stand out as a 'Defining Moment'. OBD II changed the world of the average technician. Diagnosing computer related issues became the new focus of every shop owner. It meant giving the technicians the proper tooling and training and information necessary to complete the task. For the first time the exhaust industry found itself faced with diagnostic issues in the form of the dreaded P0420 code. Today this issue still haunts many shop owners and getting the proper information through training and research is still the most reliable track to take in getting these vehicles fixed the first time.

Whether you agree with the basic premise of CAFÉ standards or not, they are likely here to stay. The newest legislation enacted by the Bush Administration in 2007 and backed by Obama calls for a standard 35.5 fleet mpg by 2016. Clearly the cars that we drive today are much safer than 30 years ago and the technology exists to squeeze more and more out of each drop of fuel while maintaining performance. New technologies such as Coil On Plug, Variable Valve Timing, Direct Fuel Injection and Manifold Converters create new diagnostic issues and every shop owner and technician must stay on top of these changes and be prepared for the next challenge that rolls into the bay.

Cleaning up the environment...one converter at a time

Gary

