

Liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) is a clean and convenient source of energy. Its main applications are off-mains gas, bottled gas and automotive LPG – used for domestic, commercial, agricultural and leisure heating, cooking and as a vehicle fuel, when it is often referred to as autogas.

LPG is well established worldwide as an environmentally-friendly transport fuel in use in over 11 million vehicles. Four million vehicles use it in Europe, including 140,000 in the UK where the market has developed over the past seven years.

About 60% of LPG comes from the separation of natural gas products and 40% as a by-product from refining crude oil.

The UK produces over six million tonnes a year, of which three million tonnes are exported. Only 120,000 tonnes are used in transport.

With over 20 million petrol vehicles on our roads, autogas could immediately reduce motoring carbon emissions by 20%.

The cost benefits

In the March Budget the Treasury set a continuing low level of duty for the next three years compared with petrol and diesel, showing its confidence in the fuel and enabling the market to develop and motorists/fleets to take advantage of this environmentally friendly fuel.

As a result, the price at the pumps should continue to be around half the price of petrol and diesel for the foreseeable future, which makes converting a vehicle attractive for the high mileage motorist, who can save around 40% on his fuel cost compared with petrol or 20% compared with diesel.

The reduction in VED for alternative fuel cars (for which LPG is eligible) was raised by between 50% and 100% depending on which band the vehicle emissions are in. Additional incentives are provided by various local authorities, including the London Congestion Charge and residents' parking charges.

While LPG can be used to good benefit in all sizes of vehicles the UK market is predominantly cars and light commercial vehicles up to 3.5 tonnes. Most petrol-driven vehicles can be converted to run on LPG; conversion is relatively straightforward and the cost is likely to be from around £1,600 for a car or light van. Vehicles converted to run on LPG retain their original fuel system and can be run on either fuel, which does provide an instant back-up if you inadvertently run out.

LPG has by far the widest availability of all alternative fuels in the UK. Filling up is easy – there are currently around 1,300 public access LPG filling stations, providing effective coverage throughout the country.

Most of them are on petrol forecourts, and details can be found on www.boostlpg.com or by contacting the LP Gas Association direct.

In addition to the public access sites, companies can easily have their own bunkered fuel sites and join the 800 or so private facilities in the UK, benefiting from the convenience and discounted price of their own fuel site.

Getting an LPG vehicle

If you wish to convert a vehicle, that is where the LPGA Approved Installer Scheme comes in, with around 200 participating companies around the UK.

The LP Gas Association operates the scheme, which was set up in conjunction with the Department for Transport. It is the standard for the industry and the only scheme to receive official government recognition. A full list of approved companies can be obtained from www.boostlpg.com or by contacting the LP Gas Association on 01425 461612.

Purchasers should look out for the logo of the scheme, which is available only to LPGA-approved installers, who can be checked with the LP Gas Association.

Beware of poor conversions

In an effort to help identification of bona fide vehicle converters, in 2002 the LPGA introduced A5-size old MOT-style certificates which are individually numbered and have security embossing. They are issued by the association only to LPGA-approved installers.

Following the conversion of a vehicle, the LPGA Approved Installer will provide the owner with an LPG Conversion Certificate which has a number of unique features (below).

Make sure your LPG vehicle is insured If you run, or are planning to run, an LPG vehicle, then, as with all vehicle modifications, the details have to be advised to your insurance company.

Otherwise, in the event of a claim, your policy may be invalidated.

In a survey, out of the top 20 companies – which account for around 98% of all premium income – all would insure a vehicle that was converted by an LPG-approved installer and only two would charge an extra premium.

As a warning to motorists, however, 16 companies reported that they would not insure a vehicle at all unless it was a manufacturer-fitted or LPGA-approved installer-fitted conversion, and two more companies would only insure the vehicle subject to a safety check report by an LPG-approved installer or an independent engineer.

For further information, see www.boostlpg.com, the independent consumer guide to LPG autogas in the UK. The site gives information on LPG, getting an LPG vehicle – whether new or

converting an existing vehicle – and where to fill up with LPG in the UK and abroad.