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110 MPG-Plus

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Out of the industrial arts department at San Diego State University comes an MG sports car converted to get 110 miles to a gallon of diesel fuel. Admirers of power and speed might not consider this a dream car, but it should perk up those who fancy escaping from the bondage of their oil company credit cards.

Professor William Guentzler and his students at the California State University have shown what can be accomplished in the way of fuel efficiency with the right kind of tinkering under the hood — replacing the original MG engine with a Japanese diesel built for tractors, to begin with.

It is a long way from this demonstration project to a mass-produced car that could offer motorists the same kind of mileage. Nevertheless, we see the possibilities for Detroit if it could manage to "reinvent the car" as it was urged to do by the government a couple of years ago.

The conversion job at San Diego State seems to confirm that miles per gallon can reach remarkable levels if one is willing to make trade-offs that effect performance, comfort, convenience, safety and other factors. The challenge to the auto industry is to push back the frontier of fuel efficiency without inventing a car that no one wants to drive.

The converted MG which has run for six months on a tankful of diesel fuel is a one-of-a-kind, but it is encouraging to know that it is not exactly a freak. There are enough of these experimental models in service that San Diego State will host a symposium this summer for designers of cars getting 100 miles or more to a gallon of fuel. We hope Chrysler, Ford and the rest can afford to send an observer.