

NHA NEWS

Hydrogen-Powered Rock and Roll

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by Richard Engel, Schatz Energy Research Center

A lucky encounter at last spring's national NHA conference led to a fuel cell demonstration becoming an integral part of the 2003 Lollapalooza alternative music tour. It began with Angi Sorensen of the Schatz Energy Research Center (SERC) giving a presentation at the NHA conference on SERC's educational outreach efforts. A representative of the Lollapalooza organization attended the same conference, on the lookout for clean energy technologies that could be showcased during the two-month tour. Intrigued by photos of SERC's Stack-in-a-Box® portable fuel cell system, he invited SERC to join the tour.

Fast-forward to July. SERC engineer Nate Coleman and the Stack-in-a-Box® hit the road with Lollapalooza for a 28-city cross-country journey, beginning in Indianapolis and eventually ending up in Portland, OR. Along with many other groups ranging from Sierra Club activists to a New York hair salon, SERC was provided with an outdoor table at each event to meet the concert-going public.

Lollapalooza was established in 1991 by Perry Farrell, lead singer of this year's tour headliner band, Jane's Addiction. The tour combines entertainment with social and environmental activism, putting the drawing power of major rock acts to work to raise the consciousness of young fans. "As town criers we're very interested in promoting alternative fuel," says Farrell. "And the voice that reaches out furthest is a musical one."

Taking hydrogen out on the road turned out to be no piece of cake. Original plans called for 44-type cylinders to be carried from show to show along with the rest of the tour equipment in a fleet of semi trucks. However, insurance concerns on the part of the Lollapalooza organization and their trucking company could not be resolved quickly enough to make this possible. In addition, some of the concert venues were leery about allowing an unfamiliar fuel to be used in the midst of a concert crowd. SERC decided to send Coleman out on the road without hydrogen, reasoning that the tour was still a great opportunity to educate the public and show off their hardware.

SERC and Lollapalooza continued working



SERC engineer Nate Coleman (left) and Jane's Addiction singer Perry Farrell make a hydrogen-powered smoothie before a crowd at the Seattle Lollapalooza concert.

behind the scenes, hoping to show off a working fuel cell for press events in at least a few venues. Their efforts paid off with high-profile presentations in Washington, D.C., Dallas, Denver, and Seattle, where Coleman took the stage with Farrell and the Stack-in-a-Box®. Coleman used the fuel cell to power a blender, while Farrell touted the coming hydrogen economy and toasted the enthusiastic crowd with a hydrogen-powered smoothie. For these special events, SERC used Federal Express's dangerous goods overnight shipping service to send lecture bottles of hydrogen directly to the concert venues.

The Lollapalooza 2003 tour helped get the message about hydrogen energy out to hundreds of thousands of 15- to 25-year-old "Generation Y" youth all over America this summer. By all accounts, the effort was a great success, and there's already talk of taking hydrogen energy out on the road again for Lollapalooza 2004.

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