

- :: Home
- :: News
- :: Local News
- :: Opinions
- :: Features
- :: Arts
- :: Sports

- :: Letters
- :: Archives
- :: Staff
- :: Classifieds
- :: Forums
- :: Advertise
- :: Subscribe
- :: Webmail
- :: Directory
- :: Calendar
- :: Athletics
- :: Daily Menu
- :: BannerWeb
- :: Career Services

Current Issue: Thursday, October 7, 2004

[Home](#) > [News](#)

Biobus fuels up on next road trip

By Kristin Fraser

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Article Tools: [EMAIL](#) [PRINT](#) [PREV PAGE](#) **Page 1 of 1** [NEXT PAGE](#)

On Sept. 13, the 13 Middlebury students of Project BioBus kicked off their second annual cross-country road trip. Driving a bus run entirely on biodiesel, an alternative fuel derived from vegetable oil, the group will make stops at schools, colleges and universities from Vermont to California to increase awareness of biodiesel and promote it as an economically sensible and environmentally conscious alternative to fossil fuels.



Media Credit: Julia Randall
 Julia Proctor '06.5 puts the finishing touches on Biobus 2 as it departs for its next cross-country stop.

"Everyone agrees that our supply of petroleum is finite. We will run out in 40 to 50 years. The great thing about biodiesel is that you can grow it. It's completely sustainable," said Stephen Swank '05, a two-time team member.

The original Project BioBus successfully completed its inaugural trip in the summer of 2003, gaining significant national media attention. This year, the students are devoting their entire fall semesters to Project BioBus.

"Last year, the whole thing just started as a road trip, but it ended up being a promotion of alternative fuel," said Swank. "We demonstrated biodiesel's workability just by making the trip. This year, we are much more specifically focused on educating people."

While the first BioBus completed its 4,500 mile journey running on used vegetable oil, the biodiesel the team is using this year is commercially available. The team hopes that, by informing the public about alternative energy sources, they can encourage a national move away from petroleum. Because biodiesel is cleaner-burning than fossil fuels, its advocates argue that widespread use could substantially decrease harmful emissions - a problem in diesel engines -- and decrease dependence on a finite supply of foreign oil,

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Campus Poll:

Does fall break seem to early this year?

Yes, I'm not ready to leave the usual weekend party life for a getaway just yet.

No, I'll take all the days off I can get . . . now!

Maybe, we'll see how I feel after that long stretch to Thanksgiving.

all while supporting domestic farming industry.

For Swank, it is important to encourage people to think of answers for the long-term. "It is clear that we have an energy crisis, and the reality is that we need to seek alternative solutions," he said "There are many options becoming available, and we realize that biodiesel is just one. But we are promoting it because it's such a feasible option. All you need is a diesel engine."

The original BioBus was auctioned off to "Hot Buttered Rum", a bluegrass band from Berkeley, CA. "We talked to them just the other day, and they were playing in Massachusetts," said Swank. "Their bus is still running perfectly. They love it."

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