

Exceptional energy

This year's European LPG Association (AEGPL) congress in Vienna proved to be a masterclass for positive thinking. Far from being dented by the economic crisis, the European LPG industry seems — on the surface at least — to be newly re-energised and bursting with innovation (see pp8-9).

The congress unveiled a re-branding of LPG in Europe by the AEGPL and World LP Gas Association (WLPGA) as "exceptional energy". Delegates duly saw the advert for LPG that the WLPGA has put together in film form, which reminded the industry of the strong appeal that this niche fuel enjoys.

The days when the AEGPL and the WLPGA seemed to have little to do with each other are now, thankfully, passed. This is good news for the industry because both organisations are finally promoting the same message. And the message is a powerful one — do not be daunted by the economic crisis, but exploit the opportunities that come LPG's way. They certainly exist, even in these troubled times.

The re-branding cleverly by-passes

the pitfalls inherent in branding LPG as, say, "exceptionally clean energy", because cleaner energy sources are available, and because LPG will never be able to resolve its essential problem in terms of sustainability — it is, after all a non-renewable fossil fuel. Or is it? An intriguing conference speech talked about the complex new area of "renewable LPG" derived from the production of biofuels.

Editorial

But the term "exceptional" does justice to a fuel that can be used to cook food, heat houses, fuel cars and feed massive petrochemical plants.

The industry in Europe faced mature markets and demand stagnation at the start of this decade, only for the new wave of environmental concern over the past five years to bring various unexpected opportunities.

The use of autogas has begun to thrive in previously dormant markets, such as the UK and the Netherlands.

And niche markets are developing across Europe, such as with the use of LPG for barbecues.

One of the major benefits of LPG in terms of environmental impact is not just its low carbon footprint as a fuel, but also its benefits in terms of air quality. The AEGPL's latest scientific briefing paper on LPG and local air quality is to be particularly recommended. It points out two important properties of LPG. Firstly it has a comparatively high heating value as a fuel. Secondly, its simple molecular structure makes LPG easily combustible, giving it a lower pollutant emissions profile than most other fossil fuels.

For LPG market participants confronted with the grim realities of diminishing trade prospects as a result of the recession, the AEGPL's and WLPGA's determined optimism might be hard to swallow. But the business message is clear. LPG is still relevant in a Europe obsessed with climate change policies and measures. The industry has not stood still or buried its head in the sand. Exceptional energy works and is, indeed, necessary in exceptional times.

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