

Going Green:

# Mikey Sklar And His Cool Grease Car

By Patch Rose  
HERALD Reporter

Global warming, my butt.

That was my thought as I walked with my colleague, Tony Archuleta, through the welded steel portals of the home and laboratory of Mikey Sklar. This was not one of those pleasant desert winter days; it was cold and wet and dark and it might as well have been New York City instead of TorC.

Lucky for me, I was soon warmed by the blinding enthusiasm of Sklar, a fairly recent but welcome addition to Sierra County. Some readers may already know Sklar without knowing his name. If you happened to drive down Pershing Street this summer, and saw a quiet fellow with brown dreadlocks wearing a heavy grease monkey suit and wide brimmed straw hat, that was Sklar. If that weren't enough of a memorable image, there was always his summer's work—turning old newspapers into adobe-type walls, to surround the old RV park that Sklar bought along with his equally fascinating partner, Wendy Tremayne.

Sklar and Tremayne are part of a global contingent of mostly younger people determined to “get off the grid,” in an attempt to be a part of an earth-saving solution. Huge solar panels and walls made from recycled newspaper are just the start of the interesting, alt-energy projects going on at the “Green Acre” in downtown TorC. On that dreary and chilly January day, I soon forgot the cold as I learned more about one Sklar project: the Grease Car.

There's more to Sklar's work than one article can cover; fortunately, in today's online age, you can get the whole Sklar scoop through his weblog: <http://greenacre-hotsprings.blogspot.com>. (Check out the story on Sklar's implanted chip that opens doors on



**YUM/VROOM!** Last night, it made french fries; today, this 'waste veg oil' donated to Mikey Sklar by a TorC restaurant, will get his "Grease Car" 300 miles up the Interstate.

HERALD photo/TONY A. ARCHULETA

command.) Tony Archuleta and I came to the Green Acre to hitch a ride in Sklar's 1984 Turbo Diesel Mercedes Benz 300, which runs on diesel fuel—and used vegetable oil.

There are mountains of details that Sklar willingly shares with interested parties; I have almost 90 minutes of tape with Sklar mostly speaking solo, with the occasional “uh huh, okay” from me. If you aren't a high-level ‘gear-head,’ as I am not; if you aren't a ge-

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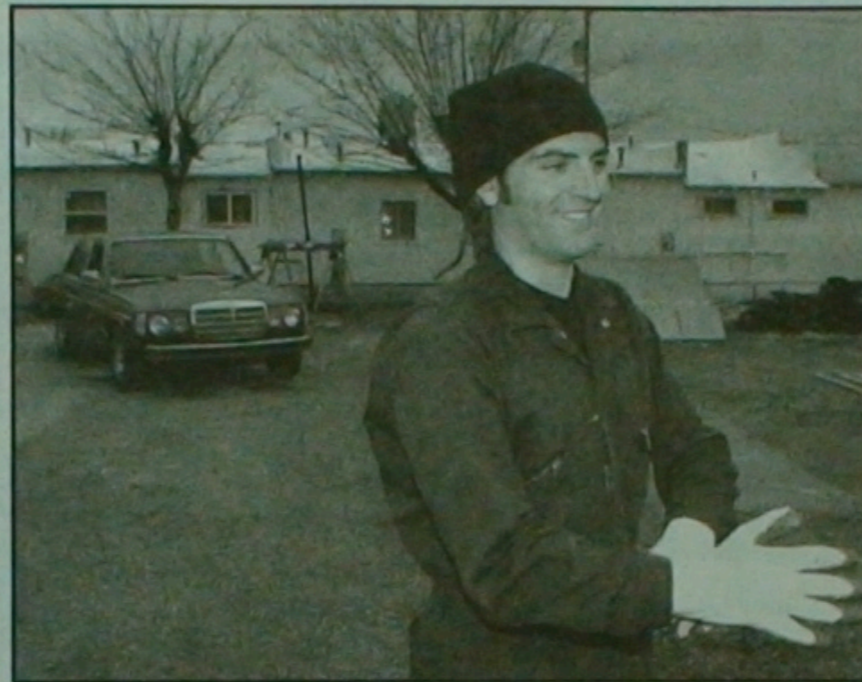
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Sklar has installed a second fuel system that integrates with the Benz' original diesel setup. As a comparison, most computer users have one operating system—Windows, or MacIntosh—that runs the programs they use on a daily basis; email, internet, word processing. Advanced computers often have multiple operating systems—for example, Windows and Linux—and they switch between the two depending on their need; power and flexibility or broad based utility.

Sklar's second fuel system holds the used vegetable oil, heats it, and when it is in a fully combustible state, runs it through the diesel engine. Sklar took us on a ride on I-25 in 'veg mode,' and while he noted slight differences in sound and ride over the diesel fuel system, I heard or felt no significant difference. A fully loaded and heated vegetable oil tank, Sklar said, takes the Benz about 300 miles from home.

As I rode with Sklar in his veggie Benz, I was both amazed and disheartened. Amazed by the ingenuity of the dual system and its eventual low-emission, low-cost fuel benefits; disheartened by its pure example of just how far into an ecological corner the world has painted itself. To date, Sklar cannot abandon diesel fuel; the Benz needs diesel for startup and for running until the vegetable oil is viscous enough to run safely through the engine. The miles per gallon of 'waste veg oil' are good, but practical problems crop up that don't exist with diesel: What happens if you run out of gas

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**GREASE IS THE WORD** – TorC citizen and resident genius, Mikey Sklar, and his 1984 Turbo Diesel Mercedes Benz 300.

HERALD photo/TONY A. ARCHULETA

### RIDING IN THE "FRYBRID"

As I shivered against the gloom of the day, Sklar stayed warm by demonstrating the varied components of the 'waste veg oil' fuel system. (Tony Archuleta stayed warm by taking a lot of pictures.) Once more, I found myself buried, not unpleasantly, in a lengthy Sklar monologue about the process. As I understand it,

nious, as I am not, then listening to Sklar may remind you of 'Doc' in the movie, "Back to the Future." Clearly, this brilliant man knows what he's talking about, but all you can remember afterwards is the crazy hair.

However, I'll try to hit the highlights, as I understand them.

- Sklar's Mercedes Benz has a diesel engine.

- Diesel engines, invented by a fellow named Diesel, go figure, are one of the best types of combustible fuel engines, in terms of power and efficiency.

- 'Diesel fuel' is an excellent fuel, but it comes with many ecological problems, including heavy particulates that are connected to global warming and are also highly carcinogenic.

- Diesel engines can run on other types of fuel, given certain modifications to the fuel system, different types of fuel filters and fuel heating components, for example.

- Used vegetable oil can be an excellent fuel source for a diesel engine. Once modifications are complete to the diesel engine, vegetable oil is an inexpensive and much more eco-friendly fuel.

- Many types of restaurants use vegetable oil for cooking; the used oil is still very clean and retains most of its energy.

- Given a good relationship with a local restaurant, the owner of a 'waste veg oil' vehicle can, eventually, run a vehicle without zero to little fuel costs, and with almost no harmful effect on the environment.



**GET THE LARD OUT**—Mikey Sklar points to his self-made instrument panel inside his Mercedes Benz "Grease Car."

HERALD photo/TONY A. ARCHULETA

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at night, with all the restaurants closed? What if you find an open restaurant, but the owner is cool to your request for taking their old cooking oil? Moreover, if you max out your fuel filters halfway through the trip, you're forced back to using diesel.

Finally, the 'high-maintenance' inconvenience of Sklar's system, to the average person, outweighs the conveniences of turning on, gassing up, and going. Weekend car tinkerers and those with serious eco-benefit desires might adopt the system, but today, it is not a solution for the usual commuter or commercial transporter. Sklar's magical car makes one thing perfectly plain: Today's expensive, planet-killing transportation system works so well that getting rid of it will take extraordinary measures.

#### **HOWEVER...**

As I returned to my office in my old, belching pickup, I found myself cautiously optimistic about Sklar and his "Frybrid" automobile. A century ago, high-minded thinkers like Sklar developed the current fuel transportation system that has transformed the world. Nevertheless, the system's huge success has become its greatest deficit. In its attempts to keep growing, the world is killing itself.

Nevertheless, Sklar is only one of millions—tens of millions—of dedicated people working on the problem. In addition, he, like all the others, has an advantage over last century's geniuses—they have the foreknowledge of the downside of too much success, the champagne hangover of unplanned consequences.

Someday, soon, someone like Sklar will figure out an answer, and the answer will be brilliant, and will have benefits both economical and ecological. As I flicked the thermostat higher at my office and contributed once again to global warming, I took comfort in knowing that one day, a Mikey Sklar will triumph. One day a genius like Mikey Sklar will magically appear, as "Doc" did at the end of "Back to the Future," still sporting crazy hair, but piloting a car that does 200 mph and gets 700 mpg on one banana peel. Furthermore, there will be no need for car keys; the door will open at the touch of your microchip-implanted hand.

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