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31 October 2007

## ROCKET SCIENTISTS INVENT FLAT LPG TANK

A space-saving LPG tank that can be mounted underneath a vehicle to preserve interior space is now available in Australia.

Propane Performance Industries (PPI) claims its rectangular-shaped Conformable Tank is half the height of a round tank with the same volume, allowing for easier under-chassis installation or petrol tank replacement.

The Conformable Tanks are also claimed to provide additional driving range, reduced weight and increased crash safety compared with traditional cylindrical steel tanks.

PPI director Guy Obren said the Conformable Tank is designed by the same engineering firm that builds NASA rockets.

“It sounds a bit cheesy, but our tanks are actually designed by rocket scientists at Thiokol Corporation. They build rockets for NASA’s Space Shuttle program and worldwide military and commercial propulsion systems.”

The Conformable Tank’s flat, rectangular shape is due to its modular construction, which comprises a row of semi-circular aluminium cells joined by straight interlocking extrusions.

The aluminum-constructed tank is claimed to weigh 50 per cent less than a matching volume steel tank. This reduced weight increases a vehicle’s fuel efficiency, reduces suspension load and maintains a vehicle’s factory handling characteristics.

The tanks are also claimed to offer superior safety in the event of rear-end collisions, having successfully undergone crash trials in police cars in the United States, where Mr Obren said they withstood impacts at speeds up to 160km/h.



“Our tanks exceed every crash safety standard in the world,” he said.

PPI is now designing a wedge-shaped version of the Conformable Tank that provides additional ground clearance for off-road vehicles.

“The wedge tank stays clear of the ground even at extremely low departure angles. We’re also examining the possibility of installing wedge tanks vertically, in the space between a car’s boot and its back seat.”

PPI is initially marketing nine- and 12 inch-high tanks via a national distribution network. “These are the most common sizes and we can use them to install everything from a Mini to a LandCruiser,” he said.

PPI has already installed its tanks in several heavy truck applications, where the modular tank design has allowed for multiple units to be combined.

“Most of our work so far has been in the commercial trucking industry, where cylindrical tanks vertically mounted between trucks and trailers can sometimes be an issue. Ours can be configured to stay right out of the axle area and can be combined to hold up to 1000 litres.”

Mr Obren said the Conformable Tanks are dearer than cylindrical steel tanks, volume-for-volume.

“Our tanks will never be cheap to manufacture because aluminum costs more than steel and we use a high-tech production process. But considering the tank’s advantages it is still attractively priced.”

PPI is enjoying huge success in the USA, where a strong market exists for propane-powered vehicles, and is also conducting business in China.

Mr Obren is presently in the US participating in a project with Legendary US car modifier Chip Foose, of the TV show *Overhaulin fame*, that aims to produce 1000 horsepower from an LPG-injected 1970 Chevrolet Chevelle engine.

The car is expected to tour Australia next year.

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