

“GasHole”: The History of Oil prices

Review of forthcoming documentary

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Theme: [Oil and Energy](#)

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“GasHole” is a new documentary film about the history of Oil prices and the Thursday, Apr 24, 2008 - 11:48:19 pm CDT With the cheapest gasoline prices hovering near \$3.50 a gallon, “GasHole” is about as timely as a documentary can get.

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Radio interview included at link below

An examination of the history of oil, how the commodity’s prices are set and a primer on alternative fuels, particularly bio-diesel, Jeremy Wagener and Scott D. Roberts’ film is highly informative, boiling down of complex issues and deliberate deception to understandable levels.

Much of that understanding is provided by a pair of Nebraska experts, Doane College professors Les Manns and Brian Pauwels.

Manns, an economic historian, tells the story of the rise of the American oil business through the monopoly of Standard Oil, the breakup of the Rockefeller empire into smaller companies and the shock sent through the industry and the pumps by the 1973 OPEC embargo and subsequent events, such as Hurricane Katrina, that have sent gas prices spiraling ever upward.

Pauwels, a psychology prof, talks about the manipulation of the oil companies, their images and the perceptions passed on via the media that have colored the debate over oil and worked to tamp down consumer outrage.

They’re far from the only people interviewed by the filmmakers. Also prominently featured are “Dawson’s Creek” actor and biodiesel consumer Joshua Jackson, Democratic Rep. Anna Eshoo and Rep. Sherwood Boehlert, R-NY, who chaired the House Science Committee from 2001 until his retirement in 2007.

The film also makes good use of captured footage, much of it stonewalling oil company executives hauled before Congress to try to justify their prices following Katrina. And there’s plenty of archival, black-and-white that gives the film texture and a little levity via historical reflection.

“GasHole” also tries to do some muckraking and in doing so puts forth, without overtly

saying it, a conspiracy theory that appears to accuse Shell and other oil companies of murder. To be sure, the death of Texas inventor Tom Ogle, who put together a 100-mpg vapor fuel system, is mysterious and troubling as are goons who followed another man who was trying to do the same thing.

But it's hard to believe that an oil company or any other corporation could have someone killed and not have that information surface later on. It is much easier to buy into the rest of the film's investigation, which shows how the oil companies bought up patents for extended mileage devices and shelved them, and how they ignored their own research that indicated engines could be made to get nearly 150 miles per gallon.

With its focus on alternative fuels, "GasHole" provides a glimmer of hope that the inevitable oil crunch at least can be somewhat mitigated. But the film subtly argues that the development of alternative fuels and higher mileage engines will occur only through consumer outrage that creates enough pressure to get politicians out of the oil company's pockets.

The question asked by the film, and most likely every day at gas pumps is, "How much is too much?" Once that price point is hit, the oil business is likely to change. When that will occur is anybody's guess. "GasHole" can show only why we have come to where we are — \$3.50 gas, Hummers getting 10 mpg, reserves running out and record oil company profits.

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