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NEWS

The little engine that could

By Nelson Bennett

"Build a better mousetrap and the world will beat a path to your door," said Ralph Waldo Emerson.

In the age of climate change, when government and industry are looking for ways to reduce fossil fuel consumption, a more apt metaphor for Emerson's quote these days might be "build a better internal combustion engine."

Reg Technologies (RRE/TSX) claims to have done just that, and is now inviting the aviation and auto industry to beat a path to its door in Richmond.

The company has developed a new "ultra-fuel-efficient" rotary engine that it claims provides three times the horsepower with half the weight of a typical piston engine.

"Industry is getting a lot of pressure from the (Environmental Protection Agency) to have lower pollution," says John Robertson, president and CEO of Reg Technologies and its U.S. subsidiary, REGI U.S. Inc. "There'll be a lot of big companies that would love to have a more efficient engine to satisfy the EPA requirements."

The new Radmax rotary engine can run on a variety of fuels - from diesel to propane or hydrogen - and has potentially dozens of applications, from airplanes and cars to mini-generators that can be used to recharge electric cars.

Because of its comparatively smaller size and lighter weight, it means aircraft using the engine can fly for greater distances, while burning diesel, which is safer than the highly flammable aviation fuel burned in most aircraft.

Radian MILPARTS, an American engineering firm that specializes in military hardware, is a REGI U.S. Inc. licensee. The company has

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used the Radmax design to come up with a new diesel engine to be used in unmanned spy planes.

"The lighter the engine, the more fuel you can add, the longer it can stay up," Robertson said. "The fact it runs on diesel, it's a safer fuel, as well - less explosive."

Because it is so lightweight, the engine could be used in hybrid electric cars - not to power the car itself, but to recharge its batteries.

"It would be like a hybrid car, but instead using the engine to run the car, you would be using it to recharge the batteries," Robertson said.

Robertson is hoping to land licensing deals with major car manufacturers. Several "major Fortune 500 companies" have signed non-disclosure agreements with Reg Technologies, he said.

"Now we feel we are ready to start licensing the technology to major companies that are interested in using a lighter weight more efficient engine."

The rotary engine is not new. The Wankel rotary engine, for example, is used in Mazda automobiles.

"There's nothing wrong with the Wankel except that they had some sealing problems," Robertson said.

Much of the company's research and development over the past several years has focused on addressing sealing problems peculiar to rotary engines.

Unlike the Wankel engine, which uses a triangular rotor for its internal combustion, the Radmax engine uses 12 vanes. Whereas the Wankel engine's internal combustion cycle provides three impulses or combustions per revolution of the crank shaft, the Radmax engine provides 24.

"It means you have a quieter more efficient running engine," Robertson said. "The lighter the engine the less fuel you should use because of the less drag. And if you have a lighter-weight engine in a car, you can have lighter-weight frame in a car."

Robertson is a former Vancouver stockbroker. He founded Reg Technologies in 1987, after he became interested in a new rotary engine designed by Richmond engineer James McCann.

A second generation of the engine was designed by Brian Cherry, also of Richmond.

The current version was designed by Radian MILPARTS in Cleveland.

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