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Friday March 30, 2012

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## SPECIAL REPORT

# The ethanol rebellion

## Motorists want unleaded as E10 quality questioned

By LOUISE THROWER

**L**OCALE fuel companies say the government's shift to ethanol based fuel is playing right into their hands as motorists rebel against its quality.

One operator told the Post his sales have increased 25 per cent since Caltex Woolworths shifted to the bio-fuel, commonly known as E10 (unleaded petrol with 10pc ethanol).

The Clinton St outlet, like many Caltex and Coles operated Shell stations, only makes premium unleaded and not regular unleaded available to customers.

The trend is angering some motorists. They argue with the state government reversing its decision not to make regular unleaded petrol available after July 1, service stations should be supplying the full range of fuel.

It's forcing those who prefer regular unleaded petrol to pay more for the premium quality at these outlets.

In Goulburn at least, operators still supplying all types are smiling.

Owner/manager of Mobil Lagoon St, Glen Couthino, said unleaded petrol sales had increased in recent time.

"We sell more unleaded than E10 and that's always been the case," he told the Post.

"I wouldn't have changed over at all to ethanol unless the government had forced us."

But as an independent, he has a little more flexibility to choose. Others are at fuel companies' mercy, he says.

Mr Couthino also operates two Caltex sites at Bega and Cooma. Bega had introduced E10 after the state government mandated a 10 per cent ethanol target for fuel companies last year. He said this outlet lost sales as a result, whereas Cooma remained stable.

"If I'd had a choice, I would have held out (at Bega)," Mr Couthino said.

"Wherever unleaded petrol is sold, people will go. In Goulburn, (the sale of E10) has narrowed the market a bit but I love it. It's a hard job matching the majors so when we get an advantage, we grab whatever we can."

His personal view was that E10 was a "very corrosive fuel," which if used in older cars (1980s and 1990s) and indeed some new cars, could destroy rubber seals, gaskets and tanks.

Mr Couthino said while oil companies and distributors had to meet a six per cent ethanol target, it was not sustainable as crops to produce the bio-fuel were not matching demand.

Continued, with more reports, page 3



**SELECTIVE:** Woolworths' Caltex and Shell's Coles Express are supplying E10 and premium unleaded to customers, not regular unleaded. Some motorists are not happy but the majors say they're hamstrung by government law.

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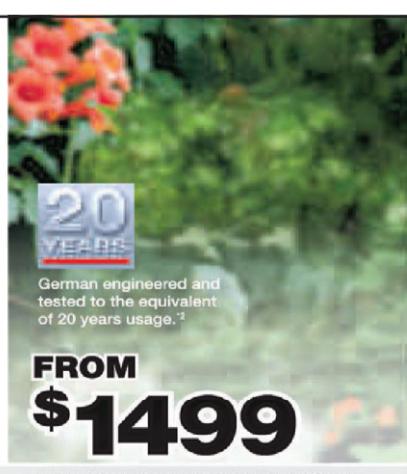
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