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## In praise of diesel

Last month I attended Volvo's interesting Smart Cities event, which looked at future urban infrastructure and transport requirements. At the end of the first session, panellists were asked what they would like to see, if a single wish could be granted. Terri Wills of the World Green Building Council said she wished that fossil fuel-powered engines could be considered in future like the cigarette is today.

Let's pause for a second to let that sink in: that's calling engines dirty, old-fashioned and generally unpopular. Since I was a child, I have seen smoking progressively phased out of public and even private life - aeroplanes, homes, offices, pubs and restaurants, and public spaces, too.

Her statement didn't diminish the smile of Lars Stenqvist, Volvo's chief technology officer, who had spent the morning talking about the vast future development potential of the diesel engine.

But anti-diesel propaganda is spreading quickly, and that's a concern for all of us. The day after the Volvo event, the Liberal Democrats launched their election manifesto. It calls for the scrapping of diesel cars and small vans in eight years' time. This comes on top of the government's controversial NOx consultation that proposes local authorities charge fines for older diesels (and petrols) in new clean air zones. Then there's the London mayor's proposal for an ultra-low emission zone that would restrict diesel vans and lorries to Euro 6 in central London from 2019.

Too few celebrate the past. The internal combustion engine is one of humankind's greatest ever inventions - up there with the computer. From its origins in the 1860s, this adaptable machine has continued to evolve, and there is no sign of that process stopping. Today's engines are cleaner, leaner and more reliable than ever before, thanks partly to the expertise of production and maintenance technicians, the latter being fostered by organisations such as the IRTE.

Even fewer appreciate the present. The role of that engine in modern life to date is even more pervasive than the computer, as it provides not only personal mobility but the primary motor of supply chains supporting everything from industrial production to retail distribution.

Whether we drive or not, whether we live in city or country, we all benefit from the diesel engine. Nothing else can do as good a job. So maybe it's time that we all spoke up a bit louder in its defence.

Will Dalrymple  
Editor