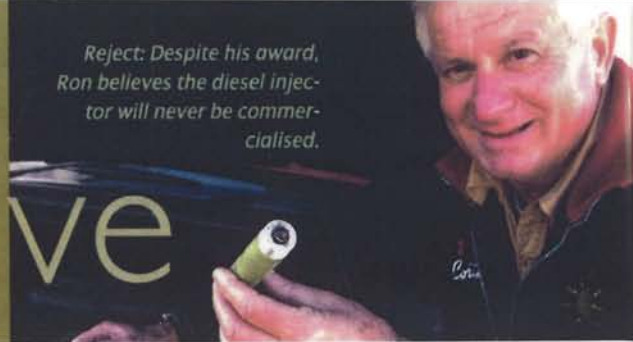


Inventive invective

Reject: Despite his award, Ron believes the diesel injector will never be commercialised.



Innovation is often hailed as a business and industry saviour, but it brings with it its own set of difficulties.

Even winning prestigious awards doesn't mean an innovative idea necessarily becomes a world-beater.

Geelong inventor, Ron Kukler, was recently announced as the joint winner of the Invention of the Year at the Australian Design Awards.

He received the gong for his outstanding invention the green diesel injector system. But despite this impressive win, Ron sometimes felt that burying his invention in his backyard might be the best option.

"I think a lot of investors think that inventors are easy targets. I want a transparent, fair agreement that equates to the considerable effort I have put in. Otherwise I would rather take my invention into the backyard and bury it," Ron said.

"Government and industry has been pushing the smart country angle, but how smart do you have to be - do you have to be smarter than inventor of the year?"

Ron's diesel injector is a pump less, hydraulically operated, super high-pressure diesel injector system resulting in 30% higher power, 30% less fuel consumption and a dramatic reduction in pollution.

Ron is an advanced diesel specialist and has worked for many large gas and fuel companies. However this invention was created in his own backyard in Highton.

"I made the first working model of the injector system in my shed. I had to be extra careful as there was always a potential for danger," Ron said.

To get the first model working he sought the knowledge of an experienced machinist, Stewart Cropley. "It's one thing to think of a new design but actually making it work is something completely different," Ron said.

So far Ron has spent nearly \$4 million dollars on research, \$3 million from a National Australia Bank grant.

"My system has been durability tested for more than 10,000 hours and the results documented with the assistance of Professor Eric Milkins from the Department of Mechanical Engineering at Melbourne University," Ron said.

The injector is also completely safe during operation. Ron said that

it has no external high-pressure supply lines, eliminating the risk of high-pressure fractures.

Ron said the only way his invention would reach commercialisation was to do it privately, or go offshore.

"I've approached government departments and business incubators but nothing has come of it. The incubators have millions of dollars but they are doing nothing, they're not handing money to inventors.

"And these venture capital people are more like vulture capital people. The only ones interested want to rip me off."

Ron said there was not a culture supportive of long-term investment in high-tech product. "Unless there's an instant dollar in it they're not interested. The problem is that there is a long lead time involved; it can't be done instantly.

"There always a lot of talk about possibilities and potential but that just means it has been done yet."

Ron said the diesel market in Australia was small but in Europe and the United States the market was multi-billion dollar.

"There's a huge amount of interest in diesel overseas and this invention comes at a crucial time because of pollution requirements."

Ron said there was some hope that the Orbital Engine Company would invest in the diesel injector. "We are at certification stage and that costs \$800,000. Where we really do need more support is at the certification stage. If governments could just help out on that, it would make a significant difference."

He said the Triton Foundation was also trying to solicit interest in turning the idea into a commercial reality. The foundation is a not for profit organisation with a charter to promote a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship within Australia. The organisation was founded by entrepreneur George Lewin, inventor of the Australian icon, the Triton workbench.

Ron has developed other inventions into commercial reality and is now working on another global product system aimed at overseas markets.

The award was part of the Standards Australia-aided Australian Design Awards.

John Van Klaveren

Imparting innovative information

The importance of being an informed innovator will be emphasised at a seminar to be held in Geelong this month.

The seminar would encourage innovation among local businesses, said Geelong Area Consultative Committee executive officer John Hansen.

The seminar was one of seven to be held throughout Victoria and aimed at:

- raising awareness and providing information to owners and managers on the importance of innovation to their business
- assisting business owners and managers to recognise the value of intellectual property
- provide an understanding of the basic principles of IP and available contacts
- give guidance and direction on progression from concept to commercialisation
- give an overview of AusIndustry innovation products and services.