

January 19, 2011

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A road trip to test Colorado-made synthetic fuel

Denver Business Journal - by Cathy Proctor

Date: Wednesday, January 19, 2011, 1:56pm MST



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Robert Freerks leaves Denver Thursday heading for the D.C. Auto Show — driving an Audi A3 TDI diesel that will burn synthetic diesel fuel made at small, test refinery in Commerce City.

Freerks is the Denver-based director of product development for Rentech Inc. (AMEX: RTK). The company, based in Los Angeles, is



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Courtesy Rentech

The Audi A3 TDI

working on turning coal, biomass and natural gas into man-made jet and diesel fuel. Its Commerce City refinery tests different inputs, blends and production techniques.

"I'm going 1,700 miles in three days, about 600 miles a day, Denver to D.C.," Freerks said. "I'm a driving fool. I've always been like that. I grew up in L.A. and in L.A., you drive."

The cross-country-trip, which started Jan. 12 in Santa Monica, Calif., is a demonstration that the fuel, RenDiesel, can be "dropped in" to existing engines, pipelines and fuel pumps without problem. Freerks carries more

"This is to demonstrate that Rentech diesel is truly a 'drop-in' fuel," Freerks said. "You can run it in an existing vehicle without any changes to the engine or any perceptible changes to the driver. He can just fill up and go. I want to drive it 50,000 miles in the next few years to demonstrate that this is a drop-in fuel and we can drive 50,000 miles without any problem."

In October, Audi and Rentech teamed for a 1,000-mile test drive of two Audi A3 TDI's in California. It's the only diesel-fueled car that meets California's strict air emissions standards. The model also received the Green Car Journal's "Green Car of the Year" award for 2010.

Rentech purchased one of the two Audis to continue tests, company spokeswoman Julie Dawoodjee said.