

BMB Transportation Group

August 2006 Newsletter



AUXILIARY POWER UNITS

Until quite recently, the price of an auxiliary power unit or genset was cost-prohibitive for many owner-operators who might otherwise have benefited from the devices, which provide power and alternative climate systems. But a funny thing happened on the way to \$3 diesel: The time to recoup the cost of even the most expensive APU shortened dramatically. Now, a modestly priced \$5,000 APU, or even a more pricey \$10,000 version, can pay back within a few years.

Dozens of APU manufacturers have popped up in recent years, and truck OEMs now offer factory installation of some units. APUs are now available from companies such as Thermo King, Gamer Transicold, Kohler and Centramatic as well as traditional APU manufacturers such as Pony Pack, Bergstrom and TruckGen.

Idling alternatives range from simple fuel-fired heaters used by northern truckers in the winter to complex generator sets that power sleeper-mounted climate systems and 110-watt appliances.

Mike Krick of Medford, Ore., kept his idling costs down for many years by using a sleeping bag in the winter or sleeping on top of a load to stay cool. "I finally got tired of living like that," Krick says. When he bought his new truck two years ago, the first thing he added was a Willis AHJ.

APUs pay back in three ways: they add comfort and convenience, they curtail idling and they reduce maintenance. But the return on investment largely depends on the price of diesel and the amount of idling you would do without the unit. Krick's ROI period is longer because his idle time is shorter than the average trucker. Still, Krick expects to pay back his APU within 30 months or around 280,000 miles.

"I'm an owner-operator, so when I make a business investment, that's what it has to be," Krick says. "After you pay it off, it's money in your pocket."

At more than \$10,000, the Willis APU is at the high end of idling-alternative devices, but it has some advantages over simple fuel-fired heaters, battery-powered APUs and most gensets. For example, the device has its own air compressor that connects to a truck's air system. On at least one occasion, Krick has been able to limp to the next town because his APU's air compressor kept his airbrakes online. "If you have a call-out charge, that's \$500," Krick says.

Taken from Overdrive Magazine July 2006 issue, page 23

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