

Environmental Action Germany (Deutsche Umwelthilfe, DUH) and Transport and Environment (T&E) are currently running the EU campaign “Get Real” to demand honest fuel consumption figures of passenger cars.

Altroconsumo is the first and most popular Italian consumer organization, set up in Milano in 1973, with more than 377.000 members. It is member of BEUC, the European umbrella organization that brings together 43 consumer organizations from 32 European countries and it is member of Consumers International.

Antonio Toccarelli, project manager of Altroconsumo, is in charge of the coordination of front-end development of MILE21 platform and project communication activities involving consumer organizations participating to the project: Altroconsumo (Italy), OCU (Spain), DECO Proteste (Portugal), and Test-Achats (Belgium).

Interview

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You have been working on the Mile21 project, which focuses on real CO2 emissions and fuel consumption of cars. Could you please tell us more about this project and its main findings?

Antonio Toccarelli: MILE21 is a very ambitious project. From one side, it intends to allow users to discover the difference which exists from cars real consumption values and those one declared by the manufacturers. On the other side, it aims at guiding users towards more efficient driving style, providing them with a complete and advanced tool to register, monitor, and compare their own fuel consumption and CO2 emissions. Thus, MILE21 combines an informative objective – to properly inform consumers about real fuel consumption – with a practical tool to be used by consumers to reduce their own impact on the environment.

The gap between advertised and real fuel consumption has been increasing over past years. Do you think the transition from the NEDC cycle to the WLTP will solve the problem?



Antonio Toccarelli: NEDC did not simulate the real usage of cars and was also subjected to a large number of loopholes to modify tests results. On the contrary, the new WLTP cycle and procedure will help to ensure more realistic values. However, much more needs to be done. For example RDE tests, which are currently used to measure only pollutant emissions, should also be used to measure consumption and CO₂ emissions in real on-road conditions. It is important to underline that without on road tests taking into account real driving conditions, there will always be a substantial difference with in-lab tests carried out under "optimized" conditions (even if more strict as in the case of WLTP).

What should manufacturers do to reduce the gap and improve information about fuel consumption?

Antonio Toccarelli: From the "transparency" point of view, car manufacturers could make real road test results available to everyone. At the same time, public authorities should conduct independent road tests to avoid any possible declaration of unrealistic fuel consumption and CO₂ values. In addition, it should be made clear to consumers that fuel consumption declared values derive from laboratory tests and that there is always a gap of at least 20% with consumption values registered in real driving conditions. Real fuel consumption values can also be greatly influenced by external factors, like weather conditions, driving style, car maintenance, air conditioning, car loads and many others. To consider these factors in fuel consumption estimation is very important. For example, in the case of MILE21, users will have the possibility to insert their own consumption data, driving style and other information related to the car that the system will register and use to improve the statistical models at the basis of the project. MILE21 will engage users, in order to make them active player in reducing the gap and improving information about fuel consumption and CO₂ emissions.

Are consumers aware of the gap in Italy? If awareness could be improved, what kind of actions do you recommend?

Antonio Toccarelli: After the Dieselgate, which had a strong relevance in the Italian media particularly connected to environmental issues, and after our class actions related to misleading declared fuel consumptions, the level of information about this issue has increased. However we do not have specific evidence to evaluate the level of awareness or to say whether awareness in Italy is different from other European countries. Certainly, in Italy there are many cars and their usage is considered like a basic need, especially for those living outside big cities with no direct connections with public transport. MILE21 project certainly represents an opportunity for our organization to test the awareness of Italian consumers about the gap between data declared by producers and real consumption data. In addition, as anticipated above, this project will help us to show to consumers how, thanks to green driving, it is possible to consume less and reduce environmental impact. However, privileging public transport over car use remains for Altroconsumo the best way to reduce consumers impact on the environment.



What can an Italian consumer do when realising that his or her car consumes actually more fuel than advertised?

Antonio Toccarelli: Unfortunately consumers cannot do much. In this sense, the purpose of MILE21 is to raise awareness on this subject and to ensure that more and more people become aware of it. At lobby level, all organizations involved in the protection of consumers and of the environment should continue to push car makers in producing cleaner and efficient cars, and to launch on the market or to enhance their own offer of electric vehicles. Furthermore, as mentioned above, it is important to strengthen efficient public transport and make people aware of the benefit represented by limiting the car usage.

What should, in your view, happen at the European and/ or Italian level to reduce the current gap between advertised and real fuel consumption?

Antonio Toccarelli: A set of factors would be needed: consumers should gain more awareness, institutions should impose stricter laws and limits. At the same time, producers should be more transparent and invest even more in new technologies applied to the car sector. We believe that MILE21 can be an important bottom-up step in activating a virtuous mechanism for helping people to reduce fuel consumption and thus CO2 emissions.

Thank you very much for the interview.

The interview was conducted by Yoann Le Petit, Clean vehicles officer at Transport & Environment

About the Get Real campaign:

“Get Real: Demand fuel figures you can trust” is a joint campaign by Transport & Environment and Deutsche Umwelthilfe. The campaign is funded by the European Commission’s LIFE Program. Our aim is to improve consumer rights, to advocate against misleading practices in the frame of type approval, and to strengthen market surveillance. Please visit the campaign website to find out more: www.get-real.org.