

**Zeitschrift:** Energie extra  
**Herausgeber:** Office fédéral de l'énergie; Energie 2000  
**Band:** - (2004)  
**Heft:** 3: [english]

**Artikel:** I've got a tomato in my tank  
**Autor:** [s.n.]  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-644037>

#### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

#### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

#### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 14.01.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

## KOMPAGAS

# I've got a tomato in my tank

**Some people put a tiger in their tank. Walter Schmid, 58, a former racing driver and entrepreneur in Glattbrugg puts a tomato in his: he fuels his car with biogas produced from organic waste.**

In March 2003 in Austria, when Michael Gorbachev presented him with the silver *Global Energy Award*, he was clear about one thing: "This is the best prize going in the environmental sector!" Walter Schmid, 58, founder and president of Glattbrugg's Kompagas AG, had been nominated for the "renewable energy Oscars", a veritable elevation to the energy hall of fame! 1300 projects from 98 countries were nominated in the worldwide competition.

**The beginnings.** The building contractor did not envisage such dizzy heights at an early age, though he always wanted to do more than just build things. So in the eighties, Schmid took up renewable energy, built solar collectors and ground heat collectors, electric cars and low-energy houses, installed wood, single-gas and atmospheric heat pump heating systems, geothermal and photovoltaic systems.

Then he came to biogas. "I was always fascinated by the idea that you could travel a kilometre on a kilo of rotten tomatoes," laughs Schmid, who was European autocross champion six years ago ("my dream: that Schumacher will also drive on biogas!"). He studied scientific literature and built a small test installation on his balcony, powered by chicken droppings, sewage sludge and kitchen waste. "One day it all exploded. What a mess! But I just knew there was something in it!"

In 1989 he founded Kompagas AG Glattbrugg. Today it has some 45 employees. The Confeder-

ation and the canton of Zurich supported the development of the first system, which went into operation in 1992 in Rümlang. "We were the first to process biogas into a vehicle fuel," he recalls. Today his company's gas-powered cars travel around with an advertisement on them: "Your kitchen waste is my fuel".

**The system.** Kompagas gets its bio-waste from green waste disposal – mainly from municipalities and wholesale distributors. In the reception bunker, foreign matter is removed, shredded and fed into the fermentation reactor, where within two weeks micro-organisms decompose the bio-waste at 55 to 60°C, in the absence of oxygen, to produce biogas and compost.

Some of the biogas drives a combined heat and power plant which generates power via a generator, and heat. The remainder is fed into the natural gas network or to the Kompagas filling stations. The sterile (weed-free) compost returns to the ecological cycle as fresh compost and liquid fertiliser.

"I pinched the idea from the horse: it eats grass in front and leaves behind manure, from which grass grows again"; this is how Schmid summarises his process. The key innovation is that he obtains energy from organic waste instead of destroying it: "Composting alone consumes energy; and incineration or tipping have environmental impacts". The Kompagas process is CO<sub>2</sub>-neutral: a biogas car emits only as much CO<sub>2</sub> as the plants have extracted from the air.

From each garbage truck, Schmid obtains the equivalent of 600 litres of petrol, and the price of his tax-exempt fuel is about 30% lower. If all of Switzerland's organic waste was fermented in biogas systems, some nine percent of car

traffic could be replaced by gas-powered vehicles.

Already about 750 cars and trucks are filling up at gas filling stations. When cars travel beyond this network, they can switch to petrol. Citroën, Fiat, Ford, Opel and Volvo currently offer climate-friendly hybrid vehicles.

**Success.** Schmid's main concern is for the raw material: compostable waste collection is not yet common everywhere: "There is massive energy potential: more than a third of all household waste is organic material!" Kompagas currently records a 20% increase in material. Kompagas marketing manager Daniel Würgler: "Many branches of industry, such as large bakeries or breweries, are looking for more environmental methods".

At present, 21 plants are in operation – 7 in Switzerland, 11 in Germany, 1 in Austria and 2 in Kyoto (Japan), a potent symbol. Six more are planned: 4 in Switzerland, and one each in Passau, Rioja and on the island of Martinique. Licensees cushion Schmid's risk. Würgler says: "Our company is the proof: protecting the environment creates jobs, it can make money, and it doesn't have to be expensive!"

Schmid's balcony explosion has led to several awards: apart from the *Global Energy Award*, in 2003 Kompagas was also awarded the Swiss and European Solar Prize. "This is important for us," says Schmid. "Conservative municipalities are more eager to work with us when they hear we have received an international award!"



Walter Schmid tanks up his car at a Kompagas filling station.



Schmid inspires visitors to an information centre with enthusiasm for his concept.