

# *A Square Deal for* **PACKAGING?**

“Liberals vs traditionalists” could be the name of the next wave in lubricants packaging, with suppliers as diverse as Shell Lubricants, Q8Oils in Belgium, JCB Service in the U.K., Germany’s Fuchs Petrolub and others now shipping 5- and 6-gallon bag-in-box (BIB) containers to customers. These cube-like containers certainly bridge the gap between 1-gallon jugs and 55-gallon drums — but can a package reminiscent of cheap boxed wine ever become a mainstream option for lubricant marketers?

Proponents say BIB packaging can end the need for quick lubes and other oil installers to stock the ubiquitous and space-gobbling plastic quarts of engine oils, and hope to see bag-in-box lubes dislodge quarts from Jiffy Lubes, Walmarts and other oil-change outlets. Shell for example has refined the concept to include special shelves and metered dispensing systems for oil changers, and online videos to urge its adoption.

The food industry made this move already, decades after Australian winemakers got the idea of packaging the drink of the gods inside a plastic bag within a rigid corrugated box. Although wine purists thought that a sophisticated Cabernet Sauvignon shouldn’t be packed in a box, and scoffed that it would spoil the taste and aesthetics of the wine, bag-in-box beverage dispensers are now popular in restaurants

and fast-food outlets, and the containers are used to ship everything from olive oil to chemicals.

Like wine skeptics though, fans of plastic engine oil containers may have doubts about BIB for the average do-it-yourselfer or individual consumer. Six-gallon bags filled with lubes and packed in boxes

can be unwieldy and heavy at 35 pounds or more. They are ergonomically awkward, and if punctured will definitely make a mess. And what DIYer needs six gallons of engine oil?

However, lube marketers such as Shell and Q8Oils have targeted a different segment for BIB oils: installers, agricultural markets and industrial plants.

## **ONE BOX, 24 QUARTS**

“Bag-in-box is not specifically designed for the end customer in the lube industry,” commented Iris Kennedy, Cheertainer product manager at packaging producer CDF Corp. in Plymouth, Mass. “It’s designed for use in process manufacturing companies or for auto-related businesses such as repair shops and oil-change stations.”

CDF’s petroleum and lubricant industry customers are coming mainly from companies that want to be more sus-

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*CDF's Cheertainer bag-in-box package has passed U.S. Dept. of Transportation as well as U.N. tests.*



tainable and do away with “rigid packages,” she confirmed.

“When we are replacing rigid packaging, we generally replace a package of a similar size. On large packages, the box can be made with handholds. We have a variety of fitments depending on the application and requirements, which include pour spouts and tamper-evident caps as well as high-flow caps,” she added.

Houston-based Shell Lubricants started offering a system with bag-in-box oils to installers in early June, describing it as “an innovative product solution, an alternative to traditional plastic packaging for motor oil.” Trademarked as the “Ecobox,” its initial outreach is to auto repair shops and oil-change outlets selling Pennzoil, Quaker State and Shell Rotella products.

Shell offers two types of dispensing racks for the Ecobox system to oil changers, with either gravity-fed or dynamic pump systems that can transfer oil from the box directly to an automobile engine. The pump system

and its no-drip digital metered nozzles simplify motor oil delivery, it said, improving many operational tasks associated with dispensing oil from individual quarts.

Inefficiencies like opening bottles and making trips back and forth to the counter and trash can are becoming history, company officials asserted. “Oil changing today is much easier than it was before. Using Shell’s unique engineered boxes with valve design, the installer could easily transfer the oil to the engine crankcase,” Steve Reindl, Shell Lubricants vice president for North America installed sales, told *Lubes’n’Greases* during an interview.

“Each Ecobox gravity system includes one rack that holds six custom designed boxes. The rack also includes six ‘pitchers’ [to make hand-pouring easier] and it can be upgraded to 12 boxes by adding a shelf. The dynamic system includes a hose and pump system that provides oil delivery right into the vehicle,” he pointed out, adding that this system can dispense eight different types of lubes, so it’s ideal for

installer locations that go through a lot of specialty oils.

On the other hand, Antwerp, Belgium-based Q8Oils hopes to appeal more to the agricultural and plant machinery markets than to the passenger car segment. Its “OilQube” holds 20 liters of oil (about five gallons), and is filled at the company’s Leeds, U.K., plant on a purpose-built, automated filling machine.

“Our product is one such innovation that offers a real alternative to traditional plastic drums. It is convenient to store and easy to use. Our product offers this and more from a box,” said Andy Dixon, Q8Oil’s U.K. country manager.

The OilQube is stackable, and because the bag collapses as the oil dispenses, there is no glugging as with a plastic drum.

### **ECOLOGICAL BOXING**

Almost all bag-in-box producers promote the package as environmentally conscious. Shell believes its version is a solution to the problem of plastic bot-



tle waste. One Ecobox system can replace 144 quart bottles of oil with just six boxes holding 24 quarts each.

“Using the Ecobox plastic liner results in 89 percent less plastic landfill waste than the equivalent 24 quart plastic bottles. The pump system provides motor oil delivery that helps improve many operational tasks associated with dispensing oil using individual quart plastic bottles, and the carton is fully recyclable,” the company explained in June.

Q8Oils, which is part of Kuwait Petroleum International Lubricants, gives equally high marks to what its OilQube can do. “It offers environmentally friendly packaging, combined with ease of use and disposal,” the company boasts. Its says its water-resistant box is 98 percent recyclable, and the inner plastic bag produces 84 percent less waste compared to a standard plastic drum. According to Dixon, the packaging is practical and cost effective to dispose of, convenient to store and easy to use.

Where cost effectiveness is concerned, CDF’s Kennedy said that BIB packages are competitive when all factors are taken into account, including transportation, fuel and storage.

“We are the only company who manufactures gusseted flexible bags. There is a patent on the design,” she added. “Other companies manufacture standard pillow bags which can be used in this application. However, our gusseted bags will perform better in dispensing and will have less likelihood of leaking.” CDF’s standard barrier film product is a combination of polyethylene and orientated nylon, to provide strength and durability.

## SUSTAINABILITY

“Four years ago when we first introduced the product into the North American market there was no demand in the lubricants industry for bag-in-box flexible packaging. Now every major petroleum producer is looking at some form of flexible packs,” Kennedy said. “We have been

contacted by many major oil companies and we already supply bags for the automotive and [lubricant] additives industry.

“We have had no problems in transporting automotive additives in flexible bags, and we have also done UN testing of the bag-in-box package at 20 liters.”

Engine oil packaged in Shell’s Ecobox will be priced relative to similar mid-size packages, the oil marketer said, which represents a savings over buying single quarts. Meanwhile, it already has been introduced in selected U.S. markets, and is now available at some Walmart Tire & Lube Express outlets. It will be in Pep Boys service centers shortly, and other customers were said to be planning implementation last month, with more to come. Following a successful U.S. rollout, the company plans to bring its flexible-packed lubes to other parts of the world, too.

“We will learn from implementation in the U.S. and Canada and will look for customers’ opportunities in other global markets during the coming year,” Reindl told *Lubes’n’Greases*.

Since food and beverage producers have created wine boxes and squeeze bags of juice to fit consumers, will the next move be to offer lubes in even smaller packages, perhaps as 1- or 2-gallon bag-in-boxes? No one has stepped forward yet, but there’s no reason BIB couldn’t replace the plastic jugs and even quarts that line the aisles of the local auto parts stores.

The last time engine oil packaging saw such a bold move may have been the 1980s, when plastic bottles overwhelmingly prevailed over composite quart cans. That’s about the same time the British pop band Living in a Box was formed, a musical reflection of the era’s great political and technological changes. Lube marketers didn’t oversleep those times either.

Today, many things come in smaller and smaller boxes: data, news, success, mail, frozen food and even wine. Why not lubes as well? ■



*Ecobox users can choose plastic pitchers for hand pouring (above), or pumps and hoses with metered nozzles, as a video at [www.ShellEcobox.com](http://www.ShellEcobox.com) demonstrates.*