Can we really square our eco-ethics with owning an Aga?

They're oil guzzling lumps of wasteful cast iron continually pumping out unnecessary heat. Right? Well, I'm not so sure...

The green issue has people divided, especially when it comes to such national icons as the Aga. Mark on the Green Building Forum says that 'There is no such thing as a green Aga. They have a size 14 carbon footprint. You could run two Chelsea tractors and have half a dozen foreign holidays every year and you'd still be using less energy than an Aga' and Adrian Brewer in his article in 'The Times' points out that '... an Aga is still half a tonne of cast iron, designed to heat up slowly and be kept hot. It isn't on-off technology'. However the vast majority of people echo the thoughts of Jane Wilson commenting on Brewer's article...'I still love them though!!'

My problem is that quite often those who love the Aga focus on the warm and fluffy feeling the Aga gives them, pointing out things like it brings a family together and it's the heart of the home. These are all worthy reasons – trust me, having grown up in an Aga house I am no stranger to planting my bottom against my parent's Aga after coming in from the cold and sharing a pot of tea and a gossip with the family. But, I think if we are to truly show that the Aga isn't this dreadful beast out to ruin the world we need to deal with cold hard facts. So...here goes!

The premises in Shropshire where the Aga Cookers are made is one of the cleanest factories in Europe, having had a £10m investment to bring it in line with strict EU legislation on carbon emissions and working practices, meaning that not only does it have reduced emissions into the local environment it is also safe and clean for the people working there.

The foundry itself is located in the small village of Coalbrookdale, a World Heritage site, and still supports the local community providing jobs for generations of families from this little village and from around Telford.

All Aga Cookers are made from an average of 70% recycled materials, and have been for the last 80 years. Car gearboxes, guttering, old machinery, door fittings, drain covers, lamp posts and of course recycled Aga Cookers go into making new ones ensuring you'll never see an Aga at a landfill site.

Once an Aga has been made it's transported from Telford to the customer by lorry. Now of course this isn't emission free but far better to have a cooker driven a comparatively short distance down the motorway for installation than imported on a massive cargo ship from China, wouldn't you agree?

Once the Aga has been hand built in the customer's home (not a green point but watching your new cooker come to life in front of you definitely adds to the warm Aga glow!) there is more to the new breed of Aga Cookers than the old-fashioned 'blisteringly-hot-all-the-time' view some commentators still extol.

AIMS (Aga Intelligent Management System) is available on the 13amp Electric and most Gas Aga Cookers enabling the owner to programme the Aga to increase and reduce in temperature during fixed intervals in the day. So, for example, you could have it running on Slumber overnight, back up to full temperature in the morning for breakfast, down to Low throughout the day and full temperature again for the evening meal. There is also a Holiday Mode allowing you to turn the Aga off and restart it whilst you are away so it's warm again for when you walk back in the door.

Using the 13amp Electric AIMS has potential energy savings of between 19-31% whilst Gas AIMS offers between 15-20%, significantly reducing fuel consumption so let's look at some facts to show that although an Aga does of course have a carbon footprint (show me a cooker that doesn't) it certainly isn't a size 14 monstrosity!

- The most popular Aga at the moment is a 3 oven 13amp electric which produces approximately 0.13 tonnes of CO_2 per week, working out as being about 0.57 tonnes of CO_2 per month.

- If we factor in using AIMS and achieving a conservative saving of 20% this reduces to 0.11 tonnes of CO_2 per week or 0.46 tonnes of CO_2 per month.

Let's tackle 'the Aga is on all the time' argument. Yes, the Aga always does emit an ambient warmth, even when using AIMS. However the upshot of this is your central heating goes on later in the Autumn and turns off earlier in the Spring and you probably never need to turn a radiator on in your kitchen again.

The Aga also negates the need for using smaller electrical appliances like toasters, kettles and toaster sandwich makers – all of which can be replaced by the Aga. I am not going to try and say you won't need a tumble dryer because there will be days when you want something dry without hanging it over the Aga for all to see, but, you will use it noticeably less.

Because the Aga is always available you are more likely to eat a home cooked meal when coming home late at night than buying a takeaway. Mmmm...maybe that's just me, but I have definitely spent more on takeaway food since leaving home!

Finally Aga Cookers are built to last a lifetime. We might want to move house and change them or trade an older one in to take advantage of new technology but left to their own devices (with regular servicing...obviously!) an Aga would run and run and run and that's a pretty rare thing in today's world.

It still might not be the greenest choice but I hope all these mitigating factors go some way to proving that our treasured Aga hasn't turned into public enemy number 1 overnight. And just remember, even with all these cold hard facts to think about, there is nothing quite like hanging out in an Aga kitchen with your friends and family to put a smile on your and their faces!

References:

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