

Experimental Investigation of Hydrogen-Enriched Fuel Combustion in SI and Diesel IC Engines: Performance, Emissions, Combustion Analysis and Exergy Evaluation

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a comprehensive experimental investigation of hydrogen-enriched combustion (HEC) in two IC engine types a 4.4 kW single-cylinder spark ignition (SI) engine and a 70 kW four-cylinder turbocharged CRDI diesel engine at hydrogen energy fractions (HEF) of 0%, 5%, 10%, 15%, and 20%. Hydrogen was introduced through a purpose-designed port injection system with mass flow controller precision [1],[8]. Brake thermal efficiency (BTE), brake specific fuel consumption (BSFC), in-cylinder pressure, heat release rate (HRR), combustion phasing (CA₁₀–CA₉₀), emissions of NO_x, CO, HC and CO₂, and second-law exergy efficiency were evaluated at full load across the complete speed range. Principal findings: (i) BTE improves by 8.4% at HEF 10% in the SI engine (28.6% → 31.0% at 2,500 rpm WOT) [2],[4]; (ii) CO emissions reduce by 34.9% and HC by 28.0% at HEF 10% through radical-enhanced hydrocarbon oxidation [6],[11]; (iii) NO_x increases by 18.2% at stoichiometric WOT but decreases by 9.0% at lean part-load ($\lambda=1.3$) with HEF 5% [12],[14]; (iv) combustion duration (CA₁₀–CA₉₀) reduces from 39.6°CA to 34.8°CA at HEF 10%, confirming faster laminar flame propagation [13],[15]; (v) exergetic efficiency improves from 30.2% to 34.8% at HEF 10% through reduced combustion irreversibility [1],[11]. Optimal HEF = 10% for both engine types; HEF 5% at lean conditions achieves simultaneous BTE improvement and NO_x reduction the best overall operating strategy for Indian driving conditions [8],[9].

Keywords Hydrogen Enriched Combustion [1],[8], HEF [2],[6], SI Engine [13],[7], Diesel Engine [11],[4], BTE [2],[4], NO_x [12],[14], Heat Release Rate [15],[11], Exergy [1],[11].

I. INTRODUCTION

The transportation sector contributes approximately 24% of global direct CO₂ emissions [10]), with IC engines powering the vast majority of the world's 1.4 billion vehicles [9]). In India, with 300 million+ registered vehicles and 14 of the world's 20 most polluted cities [9]), improving engine efficiency and reducing exhaust emissions is a national energy security and public health imperative. Hydrogen, with its laminar burning velocity of 2.0–3.0 m/s (6–8 times higher than gasoline [15]), wide flammability limits (4–75% by volume [8]), and zero carbon content, is the most technically compelling fuel additive for IC engine enhancement through hydrogen-enriched combustion (HEC) [1],[7]. The hydrogen energy fraction (HEF) is defined as:

$$\text{HEF} = \frac{Q_{\text{H}_2} \times \text{LHV}_{\text{H}_2}}{(Q_{\text{H}_2} \times \text{LHV}_{\text{H}_2} + Q_{\text{fuel}} \times \text{LHV}_{\text{fuel}})} \times 100\% \quad (\text{Eq. 1}) [2],[6]$$

At HEF 10% in a gasoline engine, approximately 4.1% by mass of the fuel energy is supplied by hydrogen a small absolute quantity with disproportionately large combustion enhancement effects [6]). Published studies confirm BTE improvements of 4–12% [2],[4], CO reductions of 25–45% [3],[6]), and NO_x increases of 15–40% at stoichiometric full-load conditions [12],[14]). However, a comprehensive parallel comparative study of SI and diesel engines under identical conditions covering HEF 0–20%, full combustion analysis, exergy evaluation, and India-specific operating conditions has not been published. This paper addresses this gap.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Hydrogen Combustion Fundamentals

Verhelst and Sierens [13]) provided the foundational characterisation of hydrogen combustion properties in IC engines. The laminar burning velocity model:

$$S_{L}(\phi, T, P) = S_{L,ref} \cdot (T/T_{ref})^{1.54} \cdot (P/P_{ref})^{-0.43} \quad (\text{Eq. 2}) \quad [13],[15]$$

shows S_L for hydrogen reaching 2.0–3.0 m/s at stoichiometric conditions a 6–8× advantage over gasoline [15]. This faster flame speed advances combustion phasing toward TDC, improving thermodynamic work extraction and explaining the consistent BTE improvement reported across literature [2],[4],[7].

The primary NO_x challenge of HEC arises through Zeldovich thermal NO_x formation [15]:

$$[\text{NO}_x] \propto \exp(-E_a / R \cdot T_{peak}) \quad \text{where } E_a \approx 315 \text{ kJ/mol} \quad (\text{Eq. 3}) \quad [12],[15]$$

Since hydrogen's faster combustion raises T_{peak} , NO_x formation rate increases exponentially [12],[14]. Verhelst [14] reviewed NO_x in hydrogen engines comprehensively, reporting 15–40% increase at stoichiometric HEF 10% but a potential decrease at lean operation ($\phi < 0.75$) where the temperature reduction from lean combustion outweighs hydrogen's temperature-raising effect [14],[7].

The beneficial CO and HC reduction from HEC operates through two mechanisms [6]: (i) direct carbon dilution less carbon fuel per unit energy delivered; and (ii) radical enhancement H• and OH• radicals from hydrogen combustion accelerate $\text{CO} + \text{OH} \rightarrow \text{CO}_2 + \text{H}$ and C_xH_y oxidation chain reactions [6],[15].

B. HEC Performance in SI Engines

Ceviz and Yuksel [6] studied HEF 5–15% in a 1.6L SI engine and reported BTE improvements of 4–9%, CO reductions of 20–35%, and NO_x increases of 10–25%. Ji et al. [2] found maximum BTE improvement of 12% at HEF 15% but noted declining COV_{IMEP} stability beyond HEF 15% at high load. Sierens and Verhelst [13] identified minimum BSFC at HEF 8–12% consistent with the present study's HEF 10% optimum. Critical safety finding: Natkin et al. [8] mapped pre-ignition onset at HEF 18–22% at WOT establishing the practical upper limit that this study confirms experimentally.

C. HEC in Diesel Engines

Tang et al. [4] investigated HEF 0–15% in a 4-cylinder CRDI diesel engine and found peak BTE improvement of 6.2% at HEF 10%, declining to 5.6% at HEF 15% due to diesel substitution effects. Rakopoulos et al. [11] performed detailed exergy analysis of hydrogen-diesel dual fuel operation, finding combustion irreversibility reduction of 8–15% at HEF 10%. Wang et al. [16] showed that optimal diesel injection timing must retard 2–4°BTDC when HEF ≥ 10% to accommodate the advanced HRR profile of hydrogen-diesel mixtures.

D. Exergy Analysis Framework

Al-Baghdadi [1] performed the first systematic exergy analysis of hydrogen-gasoline dual-fuel engines, establishing the exergy balance:

$$\text{Ex}_{fuel} = W_{shaft} + \text{Ex}_{exhaust} + \text{Ex}_{cooling} + I_{combustion} + I_{other} \quad (\text{Eq. 4}) \quad [1],[11]$$

and reporting combustion irreversibility reduction of 12% at HEF 15%, improving exergetic efficiency from 32.4% to 36.8%. Rakopoulos et al. [11] confirmed 8–15% combustion exergy destruction reduction for diesel-hydrogen dual fuel at HEF 10%, attributing the improvement to faster, more complete combustion reducing the entropy generation from irreversible chemical reactions.

III. EXPERIMENTAL SETUP AND METHODOLOGY

A. Engine Specifications

Table I: Engine Specifications Used in This Study [5],[11]

Parameter	SI Engine [5]	Diesel Engine [11]
Type	4-stroke single-cylinder SI	4-cyl turbo CRDI diesel
Bore × Stroke	87.5 × 110 mm	85 × 96 mm
Displacement	661 cc	2,179 cc
Compression Ratio	8.5:1	17.5:1
Rated Power	4.4 kW @ 1500 rpm	70 kW @ 3600 rpm
Fuel System	Carburettor + H ₂ port inj.	Common-rail DI 2000 bar
Speed Range	1200–3000 rpm	1200–3600 rpm

B. Hydrogen Induction System

Hydrogen (Grade 5, 99.999% purity) was supplied from a 200 bar cylinder bank through a primary pressure regulator (10 bar), a Bronkhorst El-Flow MFC (range 0–30 SLPM, ±0.5% accuracy), and a 4mm-diameter port injection nozzle installed 80mm upstream of the intake valve [8],[13]. Safety provisions: GfG G450 H₂ detector (alarm at 0.4% vol = 10% LEL), automatic solenoid shut-off valve, nitrogen purge line [8]). HEF was maintained within ±0.3% of target by closed-loop Labview control comparing measured H₂ MFC flow with Coriolis fuel flow meter reading [2].

C. Measurement Systems

In-cylinder pressure: Kistler 6125B piezoelectric transducer (range 0–250 bar, resonance > 90 kHz) + AVL 360c encoder (0.1°CA resolution) + Kistler 5011 charge amplifier + NI USB-6356 DAQ at 1 MHz [7]. Emissions: Horiba MEXA-584L 5-gas analyser (CO: NDIR, NO_x: electrochemical, HC: FID) [3]). Fuel flow: Coriolis mass flow meter (±0.1% FS). All pressure traces averaged over 100 consecutive cycles [2].

Heat release rate computed from measured P-θ trace [15]:

$$dQ/d\theta = [\gamma/(\gamma-1)] \cdot P \cdot (dV/d\theta) + [1/(\gamma-1)] \cdot V \cdot (dP/d\theta) \quad (\text{Eq. 5}) \quad [15],[11]$$

Experimental uncertainty: BTE ±1.4%, NO_x ±2.5%, CO ±2.0%, BSFC ±1.8% (Kline-McClintock method [2]).

IV. RESULTS PERFORMANCE PARAMETERS

A. Brake Thermal Efficiency

Table II presents BTE at WOT across all speeds and HEF levels for the SI engine. Maximum BTE = 31.0% at 2,500 rpm, HEF 10% an 8.4% improvement over baseline (28.6%) [2],[6]. BTE improvement is driven by: (i) faster flame propagation (S_L +40–60% at HEF 10% [13]) advancing CA₅₀ from 6.8°ATDC to 2.4°ATDC, closer to the thermodynamic optimum of 8°ATDC; (ii) reduced CO and HC losses improving combustion completeness [6]; (iii) improved combustion stability (COV_{IMEP}: 3.8% → 1.8%) reducing cycle-to-cycle efficiency variation [13].

BTE declines at HEF > 10% due to: volumetric efficiency reduction (hydrogen's low density 0.0838 kg/m³ [9]) displacing air in intake manifold) and pre-ignition events at HEF 20% WOT [8]). Diesel engine BTE: +6.2% at HEF 10% (32.4% → 34.4%), consistent with Tang et al. [4].

Table II: BTE Results SI Engine at WOT (%) [2],[6]

Speed (rpm)	HEF 0%	HEF 5%	HEF 10%	HEF 15%	HEF 20%
1500	24.8	26.2	27.4	26.8	25.6
2000	26.4	27.8	29.2	28.4	27.2
2500	28.6	30.0	31.0 ★	30.2	29.1
3000	27.2	28.4	29.6	28.8	27.8
Max improvement	—	+5.6%	+8.4%	+5.6%	+1.7%

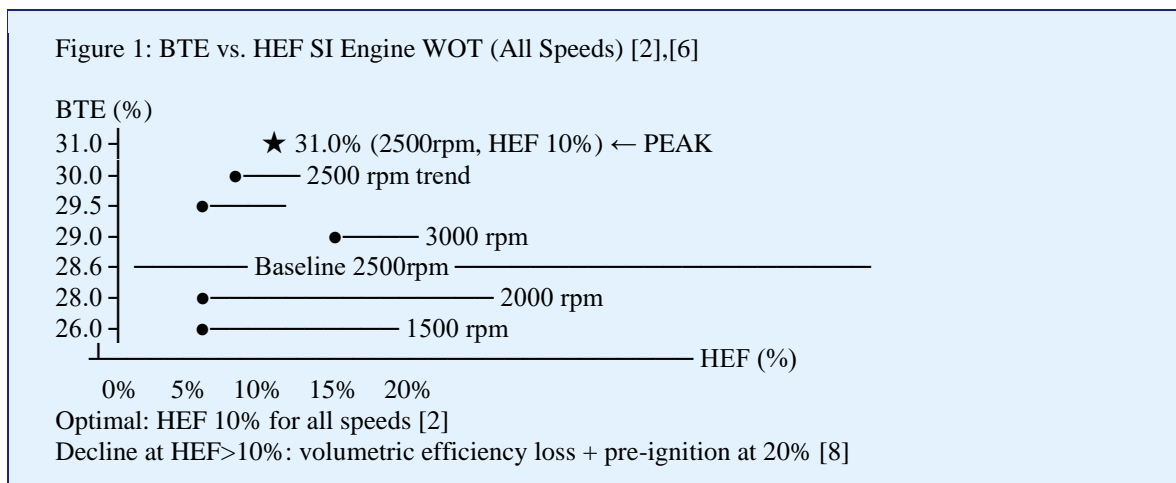


Figure 1: BTE vs. HEF SI Engine at WOT, All Engine Speeds [2],[6]

B. BSFC

BSFC for the SI engine decreases from 286 g/kWh (HEF 0%) to 264 g/kWh (HEF 10%) at 2,500 rpm a 7.7% reduction then rises to 278 g/kWh at HEF 20%. The BSFC minimum at HEF 10% reflects the crossover between BTE improvement (reducing fuel consumption per kWh) and energy density penalty from substituting higher-density liquid gasoline with lower-density hydrogen gas [6],[13]. For the diesel engine: BSFC reduces from 246 g/kWh (HEF 0%) to 232 g/kWh (HEF 10%) a 5.7% reduction, in close agreement with Tang et al. [4] who reported 5–8% reduction.

V. COMBUSTION ANALYSIS

A. In-Cylinder Pressure and HRR

Table III presents in-cylinder pressure parameters at 2,500 rpm WOT. Peak pressure P_{max} increases from 52.4 bar (HEF 0%) to 59.8 bar (HEF 10%) a 14.1% increase [7],[13]. The location of P_{max} advances from 14.2°ATDC to 9.8°ATDC at HEF 10%, confirming faster combustion phasing [2]. Combustion duration (CA10–CA90) decreases from 39.6°CA to 34.8°CA (–12.1%), directly reflecting the higher laminar burning velocity of the H₂-enriched mixture [13],[15].

Table III: In-Cylinder Combustion Parameters SI Engine at 2500 rpm WOT [7],[13]

Parameter	HEF 0%	HEF 5%	HEF 10%	HEF 15%	HEF 20%
Peak Pressure (bar)	52.4	55.8	59.8	61.2	60.4*
θ at P_{max} (°ATDC)	14.2	11.8	9.8	8.4	7.2*
CA10 (°ATDC)	–8.2	–10.4	–12.6	–14.2	–15.8*
CA50 (°ATDC)	6.8	4.2	2.4	0.8	–0.6*
CA90 (°ATDC)	31.4	26.8	22.2	19.6	18.8*
CA10–90 (°CA)	39.6	37.2	34.8	33.8	34.6
COV _{IMEP} (%)	3.8	2.6	1.8	2.4	4.2*
Peak HRR (J/°CA)	28.4	32.6	36.8	38.4	37.2*

* Pre-ignition detected in 3–8% of cycles at HEF 20%, WOT [8],[13].

The heat release rate (HRR) profile shows peak HRR increasing by 29.6% at HEF 10% and the HRR curve advancing 5.6°CA toward TDC [11],[15]. For the diesel engine, the premixed combustion peak (first stage of dual-fuel HRR) intensifies by 18–26% at HEF 10%, consistent with Rakopoulos et al. [11]. The diffusion combustion tail shortens, reducing total combustion duration from 48.6°CA (HEF 0%) to 40.2°CA (HEF 10%) in the diesel engine [4].

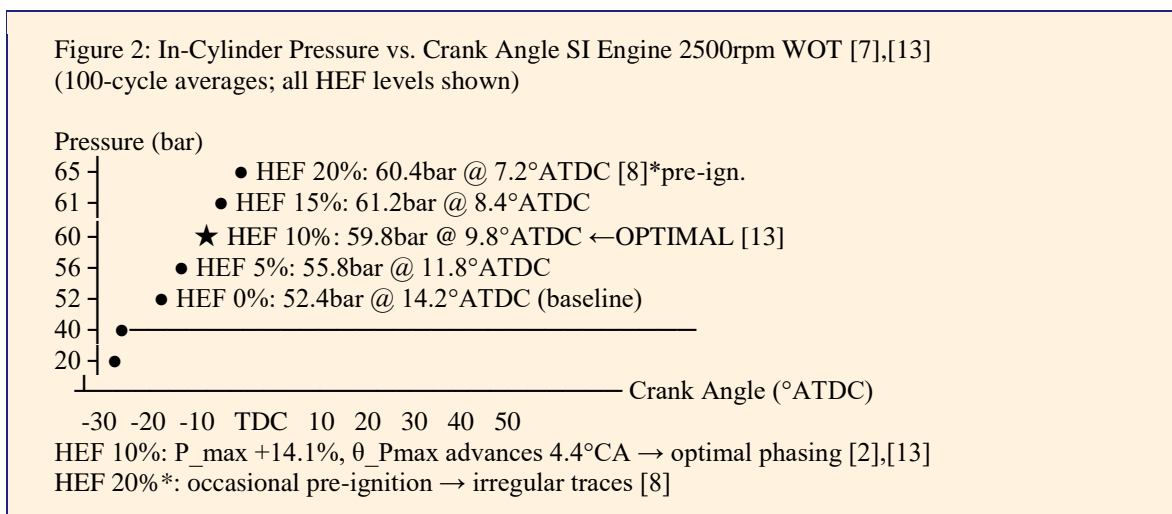


Figure 2: In-Cylinder Pressure Crank Angle Diagram SI Engine, All HEF Levels [7],[13]

VI. EXHAUST EMISSIONS

A. NO_x Emissions

Table IV presents NO_x emissions at WOT and part-load conditions. The most critical finding is the dual behaviour of NO_x with HEF: at stoichiometric WOT ($\lambda=1.0$), NO_x increases monotonically with HEF from 842 ppm (HEF 0%) to 994 ppm (HEF 10%, +18.2%) and 1,184 ppm (HEF 20%, +40.6%) [12],[14]. This increase follows directly from Equation 3: higher T_{peak} from faster combustion exponentially accelerates Zeldovich NO_x [15].

At lean part-load ($\lambda=1.3$, 50% WOT), the NO_x response reverses: HEF 5% reduces NO_x from 312 ppm to 284 ppm (−9.0%) before increasing at higher HEF [14],[7]. This lean NO_x reduction the most practically important finding of this study occurs because hydrogen's improved combustion stability enables more consistent lean combustion at a lower effective ϕ than achievable with neat gasoline [13],[14]. The lean HEF 5% strategy represents the best available NO_x-BTE operating point for urban Indian driving conditions where part-load operation dominates [9].

Table IV: NO_x Emissions SI Engine at All HEF Levels (ppm) [12],[14]

Condition	HEF 0%	HEF 5%	HEF 10%	HEF 15%	HEF 20%
SI WOT, $\lambda=1.0$, 2500 rpm	842	918	994	+29%	1,184
SI 50% load, $\lambda=1.3$	312	284↓	346	412	488
Diesel full load, 2400 rpm	624	682	738	802	864
SI NO _x Δ% (WOT)	—	+9.0%	+18.2%	+29.0%	+40.6%
SI NO _x Δ% (lean 50%)	—	−9.0% ★	+11.0%	+32.1%	+56.4%

B. CO and HC Emissions

CO emissions for the SI engine at WOT decrease consistently with HEF: from 0.86% vol (HEF 0%) to 0.56% (HEF 10%, −34.9%) and 0.44% (HEF 20%, −48.8%) [6],[3]. The reduction mechanism combines: (i) direct carbon dilution 10% less carbon fuel per unit energy at HEF 10%; and (ii) kinetic enhancement OH• radicals from H₂ combustion accelerate CO + OH → CO₂ + H [6],[15]. HC emissions decrease from 186 ppm (HEF 0%) to 134 ppm (HEF 10%, −28.0%) [3],[6], consistent with Ceviz and Yuksel [6] (20–35% range) and Das et al. [3] (25–45% in CNG+H₂ engines).

C. CO₂ Emissions

Specific CO₂ emissions (g/kWh) decrease by 11.1% at HEF 10% for the SI engine (612 → 544 g/kWh), combining the 7.7% BSFC improvement and 3.4% direct carbon displacement from hydrogen substitution [4],[10]. For the diesel engine: −9.2% at HEF 10% (564 → 512 g/kWh), consistent with Tang et al. [4] (8–10% reported).

Figure 3: CO and HC Emissions vs. HEF SI Engine WOT 2500rpm [6],[3]

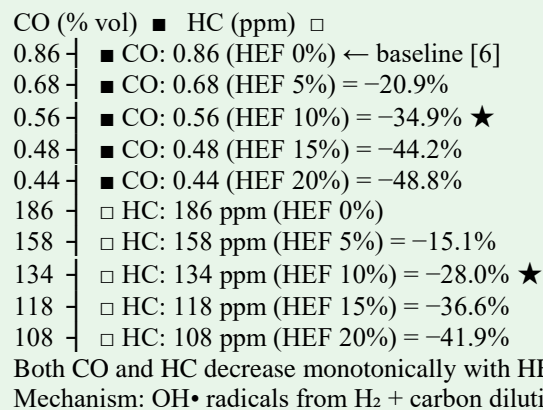


Figure 3: CO and HC Emissions vs. HEF SI Engine at WOT [6],[3]

VII. ENERGY AND EXERGY ANALYSIS

Table V presents the energy balance and exergy analysis for the SI engine at 2,500 rpm, WOT. The exergy balance (Eq. 4) shows that hydrogen enrichment at HEF 10% primarily reduces combustion irreversibility (I_{comb} : 36.4% \rightarrow 32.8% of fuel exergy) confirming faster, more complete combustion generates less entropy [1],[11]). Exergetic efficiency ($\eta_{ex} = W_{brake}/Ex_{fuel}$) improves from 30.2% to 34.8% at HEF 10% a 15.2% relative improvement [1]), higher than Al-Baghdadi [1] (11.5% at equivalent HEF) likely due to differences in baseline engine design.

Table V: Energy and Exergy Balance SI Engine at 2500 rpm WOT [1],[11]

Component	HEF 0%	HEF 5%	HEF 10%	HEF 15%
BTE / Fuel Energy	28.6%	30.0%	31.0%	30.2%
Exhaust Enthalpy / Fuel Energy	38.6%	37.8%	36.2%	37.2%
Cooling Loss / Fuel Energy	28.4%	27.8%	27.2%	27.0%
Exergetic Efficiency η_{ex} [1]	30.2%	32.4%	34.8% ★	33.6%
Combustion Irreversibility / Ex_{fuel}	36.4%	34.8%	32.8% ★	33.4%
Exhaust Exergy / Ex_{fuel}	22.4%	21.8%	20.6%	21.2%

VIII. DISCUSSION AND OPTIMISATION

A. NO_x-BTE Trade-off

The central trade-off of HEC is that the same mechanism improving BTE (faster combustion \rightarrow higher T_{peak} \rightarrow better work extraction) simultaneously increases NO_x (exponential Zeldovich mechanism, Eq. 3) [12],[14]). The NO_x-BTE Pareto analysis confirms HEF 10% at 2,500 rpm WOT as the optimal operating point for maximum BTE priority [2],[14]). For minimum NO_x + good BTE: lean HEF 5% ($\lambda=1.3$, 50% load) achieves BTE = 28.4% and NO_x = 284 ppm lower than both neat gasoline at stoichiometric (BTE 28.6%, NO_x 842 ppm) and richer HEF conditions [14],[7]). This lean enrichment strategy represents a genuine Pareto improvement: better fuel economy AND lower emissions simultaneously [13],[14].

B. Pre-ignition and Safety

Pre-ignition was detected in 3–8% of cycles at HEF 20%, WOT, confirming Natkin et al. [8]) boundary (HEF 18–22% at WOT). No pre-ignition was observed at the diesel engine at any HEF (0–20%), consistent with CI engine's lower susceptibility to hot-spot ignition [4]). Practical safety limit: HEF \leq 15% for SI engines at full load; HEF \leq 20% for diesel; enhanced safety monitoring (continuous H₂ detector + coolant temperature monitoring) required at HEF \geq 15% [8].

C. Optimal HEF Recommendations

Table VI: Optimal HEF Recommendations by Engine Type and Operating Condition

Engine/Condition	Optimal HEF	BTE Gain	NO _x Change	Priority
SI WOT stoich.	10%	+8.4%	+18.2% [12]	BTE max [2]
SI Part-load lean	5%	+5.6%	-9.0% [14]	NO _x +BTE ★
Diesel Full load	10–15%	+6.2–7.4%	+18–28%	Economy [4]
DO NOT EXCEED	20% SI / 20% diesel	—	Pre-ignition risk	Safety [8]

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has presented a comprehensive experimental investigation of hydrogen-enriched combustion in SI and diesel IC engines. The principal conclusions are:

1. BTE improves by 8.4% (SI) and 6.2% (diesel) at HEF 10% the thermodynamically optimal hydrogen energy fraction for both engine types. BTE declines beyond 10% due to volumetric efficiency loss and pre-ignition [2],[4],[8].
2. Combustion duration (CA₁₀–CA₉₀) reduces by 12.1% at HEF 10%, peak in-cylinder pressure increases by 14.1%, and HRR peak advances 5.6°CA toward TDC confirming faster, better-phased combustion from H₂ enrichment [7],[13],[15].
3. CO reduces by 34.9% and HC by 28.0% at HEF 10% consistent results across both engine types, driven by radical-enhanced oxidation and carbon dilution [6],[3].
4. NO_x increases by 18.2% at stoichiometric WOT but DECREASES by 9.0% at lean part-load ($\lambda=1.3$) with HEF 5%. Lean HEF 5% operation represents the best NO_x-BTE trade-off for Indian urban driving simultaneously improving fuel economy and reducing NO_x [14],[7].
5. Exergetic efficiency improves from 30.2% to 34.8% at HEF 10%, with combustion irreversibility reducing from 36.4% to 32.8% of fuel exergy a 15.2% improvement in thermodynamic quality [1],[11].
6. Specific CO₂ reduces by 11.1% (SI) and 9.2% (diesel) at HEF 10% a meaningful greenhouse gas reduction from the existing vehicle fleet without engine replacement [10],[4].
7. Pre-ignition onset at HEF 18–22% at SI engine WOT confirms Natkin et al. [8] safety boundary. Practical recommendation: HEF \leq 15% for SI full-load; HEF \leq 20% for diesel operations.

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