

# Petrol PLAZA

## Interview with Yasser Manaseer: “By 2021 all our stations will be powered by renewable energy”

We speak to leading energy company Manaseer Oil & Gas, owner of one of the biggest fuel retailing networks in Jordan. Yasser Manaseer, founder and General Manager, talks us through the company’s new focus on natural gas and how they became one of the country’s leading players in just twenty years.



*Eng Yasser Manaseer Holds Bachelor’s degree of Science in Chemical Engineering. He has 32 years of experience in organizations management in Jordan in various business sectors. In 2001 he started Manaseer Oil & Gas in view of the increasing demand of refined petroleum products and to enhance the downstream services in the Jordanian market, while setting the organization policy, forming the quality & HSE standards and following up on the project execution as well as the expansion of the company.*

**Q. Manaseer Oil & Gas only entered the fuel retail market in 2002. How have you managed**

## **to put yourself in this position?**

A. Manaseer is one of the three main retailers and fuel distribution in Jordan. We are the only one to include modern service stations in our network. Before petrol stations were old (oily and greasy station), with no restrooms, no praying rooms... When Manaseer entered the industry they built new, modern stations, mainly in the highways. They changed the mentality of the Jordanian customer.

We currently have 77 stations owned and operated by Manaseer. The plan is to reach 100 sites by the middle of 2022. We also supply fuel to more than 85 sites under the Manaseer Express flag. We use the latest technology in fuel pumps for faster and more efficient filling and payment systems using credit cards or our prepaid cards, eCash and eFill and RFID. Mechanism such as eFill has allowed large fleets to save lots of money. The fuelling process does not begin until the registered car is seen by the CCTV camera and fleet owned can register the whole process.

Some 2,300 employees at our gas stations carry out other services such as oil changes, tire services, car maintenance facilities, and car washes. Our stations are truly a one stop location as we additionally offer services that make other parts of your life easier like supermarkets, fast food restaurants, bakeries, pharmacies, ATMs, toilets, prayer rooms, MacDonald's, pharmacies and coffee. In the coming years we would like to expand to other parts of the Middle East.



## **Q. Why has Manaseer Oil & Gas decided to invest heavily on alternative and renewable fuels?**

A. We import petrol from our neighbours and prices are quite expensive both for manufacturing and commercial use. That is why we want to install CNG plants and provide cheap energy to the country.

There will be other forms of fuel too such as renewable diesel.

Our parent company Manaseer Group has a truck fleet of 1,000 units. These could be converted to LNG - we can save 45% of the diesel use and reduce carbon emissions by 65%. This is one of the major targets of Manaseer. Some 60% of our gas stations currently have solar panels and we are in talks to install a wind turbine at another site. As our stations are really big and include a wide range of services, a lot of energy is needed. Next month we will have the first station running 100% on solar and wind energy, and by the end of 2021, all our stations will be powered by some kind of renewable energy.

The production of biodiesel remains a trickier challenge as the Government still has strict regulations

**Q. Would the 1,000 trucks be exclusively converted to LNG?**

A. We are looking to convert a few trucks as a pilot project. The diesel system will stay, so the vehicle will work with both fuels. The main change will be by adding a LNG double wall tank. The insulation between the double wall is vacuumed with plastic insulated material. The driver will be able to choose between diesel and LNG to operate his vehicle.

**Q. What is the use of LNG and CNG in Jordan right now?**

A. Our natural gas connection is quite expensive so at the end of 2018 we made the decision to install a plant to produce CNG and LNG. After making the study we saw that it is feasible, we will receive support from the official investment fund as this project will bring clean and cheap energy to the country. Many factories need natural gas but it would cost them millions to connect to the gas pipe lines - CNG is the solution for them. It will be available for all manufactures and houses as well as cars in the future. We currently have zero cars running on CNG. Manaseer will be the first retailer to provide CNG.





**Q. Manaseer has also begun installing electric vehicle charging infrastructure.**

A. We have 27 EV charging points including 10 Tritium, 5 ABB and 12 Tesla chargers.. There are some 10,000 EV cars right now and around 30,000 are held in customs – that will open the market. Our target is to further encourage the population of Jordan to move into the EV sector. All our stations have an electrical connection so if we need to add a charger, it is possible. If we would like to add LNG or CNG, we have also left a space in most of our stations for that, especially those on highways. Currently, there is a total of 1.6 million registered cars in Jordan.

**Q. You mentioned fleet programs such as eFill. What other forms of payments have you included in your network?**

A. We have contracts with two of the three mobile companies that offer mobile payments. We are also in conversations with Zain. This way many of our customers can pay for their products through a mobile app. We have also tested the use of cryptocurrencies but the Government still does not allow this.

**Q. You introduced Euro6 one year ago. How has the experience been?**

A. As you know Euro 6 for gasoline and Euro 5 for diesel has less sulphur which add benefits for the environmental side, health and reduce the emission on one hand. On the other hand clean fuel mean less mechanical maintenance, also it increase the mileage of changing vehicle oil . In line with our commitment for outstanding customer and environmental care, we enhance our diesel by using fuel additives that produce less emissions and higher mileage as well as keeping the motor clean. Our stations also contain filters and vapour recovery.



**Q. What do you see as some of the main challenges for the fuel retail industry in Jordan?**

A. We have one main problem – fuel prices are set by the Government on a monthly basis, unfortunately the fuel market is not open. We import fuel every single month. That means there's an unfair competition between local and imported fuel product, and the quality of the imported is much higher than the local.

Another challenge we see is that car manufacturers are switching their cars to hydrogen, CNG and other forms of alternative fuels. That is why we want to be the first company to be ready for the conversion between 2030 and 2040.

**Q. As a leading energy group in Jordan, what kind of initiatives have you carried out due to COVID-19?**

A. We have made a number of contributions to local and national authorities including donation to the Ministry of Health, and for the Breakdown Fund managed by the Ministry of Labour, and for civil defence to build a new department in the south of Jordan and acquire equipment. All this for a total amount of 500,000JD (\$705,200). Other contributions were made to universities for research. We also gave logistic support for local authorities to clean and sanitize roads and vehicles. And to reduce the contamination the company have strict police to sanitizer the truck, drivers, employees, and costumers. And every single hour the employees clean the station by spraying sterilizers.

Due to the pandemic, sales are currently down by 20% compared to pre-COVID-19 numbers. All our stations normally open 24-hours but the Government imposed a ban on stations opening from 10PM to 6AM.

Interview by Óscar Smith Diamante