



Simply Green

Live well, tread gently

Summer 2009—Fuel Economy

Why is Fuel Economy So Important?

There are a number of valid answers to this question. For example, our dependence on oil makes us vulnerable to oil market manipulation and price shocks. Oil is a non-renewable resource, and we cannot sustain our current rate of use indefinitely. Using it wisely now allows us time to find alternative technologies and fuels that will be more sustainable. Carbon dioxide (CO₂) from burning gasoline and diesel contributes to global climate change. Fuel economy will help reduce our carbon footprint.

*Finally, **don't we all want to save some money?** The Planet Manhasset Committee, part of the Manhasset School Community Association (SCA), has compiled these helpful money-saving fuel economy tips, including how to find cheap gas in your area, and the best times to fill up. We hope these handy tips help make your summer travel more efficient.*

Finding Cheap Gas*

Want to know where to find the least expensive fuel near your home or place of work? Several Web sites now offer that information free, without the need to register. Sites we liked best show prices for regular, plus, premium, and diesel at local gas stations, and they tell you when the prices were last updated. They also link to maps to help locate the gas stations. The first site derives its information from credit-card transactions at more than 85,000 outlets nationwide, plus reports from individual chains. Other sites mainly use reports from volunteer "spotters," which may or may not be verified by the Web sites. As such, they're good for general reference tools. Here are four helpful sites:

- **The Automobile Club of America** (www.aaa.com) directs you to the proper state AAA chapter based on zip code. Your chapter may have its own gas-price finder.
- **www.GasBuddy.com** links to gas-price sites in Canada and the U.S. by specific state or province, county, or parish. Gas Buddy tracks only regular gasoline and diesel fuel. Some tested locations returned only regular gas price data, while others returned no information.
- **Automotive.com** (<http://www.automotive.com/gas-prices/index.html>) highlights the lowest prices for each grade within your area when available. Prices per grade were spotty, at best, in our nationwide sampling.
- **www.GasPriceWatch.com** also spotlights the best local price, and it also lets you sort your results to find the most recently posted prices.

"Finding cheap gas on the Web" (<http://blogs.consumerreports.org/electronics/2008/07/finding-cheap-g.html>) offers an evaluation of these sites as well as other online gas price listings.

Fuel-Saving Tips*

- **Avoid High Speeds.** As your speed increases, your aerodynamic drag increases in an exponential fashion. Driving 62 mph (100 km/h) versus 75 mph (120 km/h) will reduce fuel consumption by about 15%.
- **Do Not Accelerate or Brake Hard.** By anticipating the traffic and applying slow steady acceleration and braking, fuel economy may increase by as much as 20%.
- **Keep Tires Properly Inflated.** Keep tire air pressure at the level recommended by your vehicle manufacturer. A single tire under inflated by 2 PSI, increases fuel consumption by 1%.
- **Use A/C Sparingly.** When the air conditioner is on it puts extra load on the engine forcing more fuel to be used (by about 20%). The defrost position on most vehicles also uses the air conditioner.
- **Keep Windows Closed.** Windows open, especially at highway speeds, increase drag and result in decreased fuel economy of up to 10%.
- **Service Vehicle Regularly.** Proper maintenance avoids poor fuel economy related to dirty air filters, old spark plugs or low fluid levels.
- **Use Cruise Control.** Maintaining a constant speed over long distances often saves gas.
- **Avoid Long Idles.** If you anticipate being stopped for 30 seconds or more, shut off the car. Restarting the car uses less fuel than letting it idle for this time.
- **Purchase a Fuel Efficient Vehicle.** When buying a new vehicle, examine the vehicle's rated fuel efficiency. Usually choosing a small vehicle with a manual transmission will provide you with great fuel economy. Choosing the most efficient vehicle can really help you save every time you fill up your tank. A vehicle that gets 30 MPG will cost you \$520 less to fuel each year than one that gets 20 MPG (assuming 15,000 miles of driving annually and a fuel cost of \$2.08). Over a period of 5 years, the 30-MPG vehicle will save you \$2,600. Use the Fuel Calculator at www.FuelEconomy.gov when shopping for a new or used car.
- **Choose the right octane.** For most cars, the recommended gas is regular octane. Using a higher octane gas than the manufacturer recommends offers no benefit, and it costs you at the pump. Unless your engine is knocking, buying higher octane gas is a waste of money.
- **Stay away from gas-savings gadgets.** Be skeptical about any gadget promising to improve your mileage. The Environmental Protection Agency has tested more than 100 such devices -- including "mixture enhancers" and fuel line magnets -- and found that very few provided any benefits. Those that did work provided only a slight improvement. Some can even damage your engine.
- **Change your oil.** Clean oil reduces wear caused by friction between moving parts and removes harmful substances from the engine. Motor oil that says "Energy Conserving" on the performance symbol of the American Petroleum Institute contains friction-reducing additives that can improve fuel economy.
- **Combine errands.** Several short trips taken from a cold start can use twice as much fuel as one trip covering the same distance when the engine is warm.
- **Consider carpooling.** Many cities make it even easier by matching up commuters.
- **Bus it, bike it or hoof it.** Why not leave your car at home and consider public transportation, a bike ride or a stroll across town?
- **Keep a record of your gasoline usage.** This is the best way to see if your car may be having some fuel robbing problems. Your local office supply store should have a simple booklet for recording every time you buy gas or service your car. Check your fuel economy with every fill up using this record; it should stay pretty consistent over time.
- **Avoid traveling in low gears.** If your car has an overdrive gear, use it. Traveling at fast rates in low gears can consume up to 45% more fuel than is needed.
- **Remove excess weight from trunk or inside of car** - extra tires, back seats, unnecessary heavy parts. Extra weight reduces mileage, especially when driving up inclines. Avoid using roof top carriers - they can cause serious drag on the car and lessen your mileage by up to 15%. Pack it in or leave in behind.

How to Buy Gasoline*

- **Buy gasoline on Wednesday mornings.** Normally the best time to buy gasoline from a pricing point is Wednesday morning. The prices are usually moved up for weekend by the oil companies and by Wednesday you have had three days of competition setting in among the stations to help drive the price down a few cents. Most stations generally raise or lower their prices in the morning - around 10 AM. Expect a rise to occur on Thursday morning.
- **Avoid purchasing at exit ramps for highways** - especially during holiday travel. These stations may be convenient but they know they have a captive audience. Try to fill up at your local station before you leave town - you know the one - where the prices are lowest.
- **If you have to buy on the highway, try to buy at the border stations when traveling between states.** Many times these stations are very aggressive at trying to gain your business and many can take advantage of differences in state taxes.

References:

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