

Cutting the cost of motoring

With crude oil prices soaring, the cost of petrol at the pump has been increasing almost week by week.

Moreover, the political instability, which is impacting on so many oil producing nations and which is largely responsible for the hike in prices, is unlikely to go away in the near future; therefore prices are likely to remain high for the medium to long-term. This means if we are to avoid being out of pocket we all need to plan our car use more intelligently than we currently do.

Don't despair there are a number of practical common-sense measures we can all take to reduce the cost of motoring. What's more for most motorists the savings to be made from a change in driving habits can far outstrip the recent rises at the pumps.

Remember by cutting your fuel costs you are also cutting your carbon dioxide emissions. Every litre of fuel you save prevents 2.31 Kg of carbon dioxide from being released into the environment.

There are three major ways you can reduce your fuel bill:

- Reduce the number of miles you drive
- Cut the amount of fuel you use when driving
- Improve the fuel economy of your car

Reducing the number of miles you drive

1. Before you jump into the car ask yourself if you could walk or cycle to your location. You can improve your health and save money by leaving your car at home and walking or cycling to the local shops or popping around the corner to see a friend or relative instead. Remember short journeys are very fuel inefficient, as the car engine does not have time to warm up to its maximum efficiency.
2. Very often it is cheaper to take the bus into town, as not only do you reduce your fuel bill but you also avoid parking charges.
3. Always plan ahead and combine several trips into one, this avoids making additional return journeys. One long multi-purpose trip is much more fuel efficient than several short journeys, not least because cold engines run less efficiently.
4. Explore the possibility of lift-sharing with a colleague, friend or neighbour, or log on to liftshare.com.
5. When you set out on a journey, especially a long journey, study a road atlas to make sure you are driving shortest route.

Cutting the amount of fuel you use when driving

1. Turn the engine off when you are stuck in traffic for long periods.
2. Turn off the engine when you are waiting to pick up or dropping off passengers
3. Reduce your speed. Travelling at 56 mph rather than 70mph reduces your fuel use by around 10%.
4. Stick to speed limits, especially on motorways. Travelling at 70 mph rather than 80 to 85 mph can save you around 4p per mile depending on the car you drive.
5. Drive smoothly. Avoid the routine of accelerating hard and breaking harshly. It has been estimated that those who drive smoothly and intelligently can save a staggering 30% of fuel consumption compared with those with a heavy right foot.
6. Plan ahead when driving. By keeping your distance from the car in front and monitoring the traffic ahead you can slow down efficiently and avoid constant use of the break.

Improving the fuel economy of your car

1. Avoid carrying unnecessary heavy items, such as tool kits or golf clubs. Leave such items at home when you are not using them, as transporting extra weight means the engine has to work harder, thus using extra fuel and wasting money.
2. Ensure that the tyres are inflated to the correct pressure – you can find the required pressure in your owner's manual. According to figures provided by the RAC under inflated tyres increase resistance and can increase fuel consumption by up to 2%.
3. If you are not using them remove roof racks and/or bull bars. Not only do they add to the weight of the car but these items also increase aerodynamic drag, adding up to 5% to your fuel consumption.
4. If you have air conditioning fitted try and minimise its use. Wherever possible at slower speeds open your car windows and ventilate the car naturally. Be aware that at higher speeds open windows can create significant drag, so it is better to use the car's conventional air ventilation system, or air con if really necessary. Air conditioning can add around 10% to your fuel consumption.
5. Don't overfill your fuel tank and avoid spilling fuel at the pump. Excess fuel evaporates, so fill only to the first click off at the pump. Also ensure that the fuel cap is in good condition and that it is fitted securely after filling.
6. Have your car serviced regularly and according to the manufactures mileage recommendations (look in your owner's manual for details). It is important

that air filters are changed regularly, oil levels are correct and that the engine is properly tuned. A regular service will save you money in the long run, as the car should last longer and run far more economically.

7. The car you drive has a huge impact on your fuel bills and the emission levels, so the next time you buy a car think economy first. As a rule of thumb, small cars use less fuel than large cars; diesel engines are more economical than petrol engines; four-wheel drives are heavier on fuel than two wheel drives; and manual gear boxes are more fuel efficient than automatics. Remember modern highly efficient lean burn engines also offer an outstanding drive, so you don't need to go out and buy a 3 litre car to achieve driver comfort
8. Think about making your next car a hybrid, which makes use of a battery powered motor in slow moving urban conditions and a more conventional fuel engine in fast flowing conditions. The Honda Insight, for example, offers a fuel consumption of around 83mpg. If you drive approximately 10,000 miles a year at an average of around 30 to 40 mpg, a hybrid car could save you over a thousand of pounds on your fuel bill every year. The Toyota Prius also offers an excellent economy rate.