FTC Consumer Alert

Federal Trade Commission ▪ Bureau of Consumer Protection ▪ Office of Consumer & Business Education

Saving Money at the Gas Pump: A Bumper-to-Bumper Guide

Whether driving cross-town or cross-country, everybody wants to save money at the pump. Regardless of the make and model, your car's estimated gas mileage is just that — an estimate. An important variable is how you fuel, drive, and maintain your car. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the nation's consumer protection agency, offers these bumper-to-bumper tips to help you drive down the cost of driving:

The Gas Tank

Making the right choice at the gas pump is an important first step to keeping your car running efficiently — and economically.

- **Follow your owner's manual recommendation for the right octane level for your car.** For most cars, the recommended gas is regular octane. Using a higher octane gas than the manufacturer recommends offers no benefit — and costs you at the pump. Unless your engine is knocking, buying higher octane gas is a waste of money. Looking for more information on selecting the right octane level for your car? See *The Low-Down on High Octane Gasoline*, at www.ftc.gov/SaveGas.
- **Gas savings gadgets? Steer clear.** Be skeptical about any gizmo that promises to improve your gas mileage. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has tested over 100 supposed gas-saving devices — including "mixture enhancers" and fuel line magnets — and found that very few provided any fuel economy benefits. Those devices that did work provided only a slight improvement in gas mileage. In fact, some products may even damage your car's engine or cause a substantial increase in exhaust emissions. For a full list of tested products, visit www.epa.gov/otaq/consumer/reports.htm. For more information, check out *Gas Savings Products? Fact or Fuelishness*, at www.ftc.gov/SaveGas.

The Steering Wheel

When it comes to stretching your gas budget, ***how*** you drive can be almost as important as how far you drive.

- **Stay within the posted speed limits.** Gas mileage decreases rapidly at speeds above 60 miles per hour.
- **Avoid unnecessary idling.** It wastes fuel, costs you money, and pollutes the air. Turn off the engine if you anticipate a wait.
- **Avoid jackrabbit starts and stops.** You can improve in-town gas mileage by up to five percent by driving "gently."
- **Use overdrive gears and cruise control when appropriate.** They improve fuel economy when you're driving on the highway.
- **For more information,** check out *Good, Better, Best: How to Improve Gas Mileage*, at www.ftc.gov/SaveGas.

The Tires

Keeping your tires properly inflated and aligned can increase gas mileage up to three percent.

Under the Hood

You don't have to be a gearhead to keep your engine purring at its fuel-efficient best.

- **Keep your engine tuned.** Tuning your engine according to your owner's manual can increase gas mileage by an average of four percent.
- **Change your oil.** Clean oil reduces wear caused by friction between moving parts and removes harmful substances from the engine. You can improve your gas mileage by using the grade of motor oil in your owner's manual and changing it according to the schedule recommended by your car manufacturer. Motor oil that says "Energy Conserving" on the performance symbol of the American Petroleum Institute contains friction-reducing additives that can improve fuel economy.

The Trunk

An extra 100 pounds in the trunk can reduce fuel economy by up to two percent. Removing non-essential stuff can save you at the pump.

The Driver's Seat

The only sure-fire "equipment" guaranteed to get more from a gallon of gas is a fuel-conscious driver behind the wheel.

- **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?

For more information on energy efficiency at the gas pump and throughout the house, check out *Saving Starts @ Home: The Inside Story on Conserving Energy*, at www.ftc.gov/energysavings.

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