

Improve Your Gas Mileage

By Curt Donnelley

Even those of us not staring early retirement in the face can remember a time when gasoline cost under a dollar a gallon. Those days seem to be over forever, and with a gallon of gas now increasing each week, the kind of mileage your vehicle gets is a serious financial concern. Fortunately, automakers haven't been completely sitting on their hands regarding this problem, and new engines in general are more fuel-efficient than ever. But there are some things you can do to further maximize your gas mileage:

- 1) **Buy a new car.** With Toyota's new Prius leading the pack of hybrid vehicles getting around 55 mpg on the highway, and with a four month waiting list to buy one, other automakers have serious plans to introduce hybrid vehicles of their own. Over the next year or so, look for Ford's highly anticipated Escape small SUV hybrid, Honda's new Civic Hybrid, as well as new hybrid models from just about every other carmaker – including the Lexus RX (and if Lexus is jumping on the bandwagon, you know hybrids are here to stay.) What is a hybrid? Basically, a hybrid combines gas and electric power, allowing each to do what they do best performance-wise – an electric motor for torque-y standing starts and acceleration and a gasoline engine for highway driving where they sip rather than guzzle your hard earned gallon of gas. The gasoline engine recharges the batteries – no plug.
- 2) **Buy a different car.** Sure, this is America and you've got a right to drive whatever darn thing you want, but if your 10 mpg Hummer never sees the wrong side of a curb, maybe you need to reassess your priorities. If you assess your transportation needs with your ego checked at the door, you just might find that a relatively more fuel-efficient vehicle will still do everything you want without burning up gas dollars faster than you can get from one station to another. If there's one truth to car buying these days, it's that there are so many choices and so many great cars, trucks and SUV's out there that you really don't have to buy one that seriously guzzles gas unless you absolutely want to, and even a few miles per gallon can save you a lot of money in the long run.
- 3) **Buy another car.** Sure, you may actually need that big SUV or Crew Cab truck to haul the family camping gear or load up on the way to the job site, but if it's your daily driver, maybe you should invest in a smaller vehicle just to get around town. The money you save on gas might just help pay for it.
- 4) **Don't skimp on maintenance.** Making sure that you follow the scheduled maintenance recommended by the dealer is one of the best ways of wringing that last mile out of a gallon of gas. And check out your local auto-supply store – there are better performing items like oil and air filters, spark plugs and the like that may just add a few miles to your driving range – though beware of extravagant claims: nothing you pour into your gas tank is going to add ten miles to a gallon of gas unless it's doing something to your engine that it wasn't designed to handle.
- 5) **Reassess your driving style.** If you look at every stop light as the beginning of a NASCAR race, if you're always a little too close to the guy in front of you or if you think you hear a lot of horns going off every time you get on the road, maybe

you're not driving with an eye to better gas mileage. Gunning the engine from a standing start, flooring it and slamming on the brakes, basically anything which isn't smooth, controlled acceleration and de-acceleration lowers your gas mileage – you might as well knock a hole in your tank and let the gas leak onto the pavement. If you need to drive like Dale Earnhardt, Jr., do what he does and head to the racetrack.

- 6) **Walk.** Do you really need to drive everywhere? Increase your walking and decrease your driving whenever you can and your health will benefit as much as your total bill at the gas station.

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