

FTC Consumer Alert

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Division of Consumer & Business Education

Saving Money at the Pump: Tips to Stretch Your Gas Dollars

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 get the most mileage out of your gas purchases:

At the Pump

Check your owner's manual for the most effective octane level for your car. For most cars, the recommended gasoline is regular octane. In most cases, using a higher octane gas than the manufacturer recommends offers no benefit — and costs you at the pump. Some cars do require premium fuel, so before you fill up, check your owner's manual to find out if the higher-priced gas is required or just recommended. Looking for more information on selecting the right octane level for your car? See *The Low-Down on High Octane Gasoline*.

Shop around. Specialized phone apps and websites can help you find the cheapest gas prices in your area. Also, many gas stations advertise regular weekly specials at their locations.

Charge it. Consider a credit card that offers cash back for gas purchases. Some offer two to five percent rebates, but it's wise to read the fine print. Fees, charges, interest rates, and benefits can vary among credit card issuers.

On the Road

Start driving as soon as the engine is started. Modern engines don't need much time to warm up. The engine actually warms up more quickly once the car is operating, and will stay warm after stopping.

Don't speed. Gas mileage decreases rapidly at speeds above 60 miles per hour. According to **Fueleconomy.gov**, each 5 mph you drive over 60 mph is like paying an additional 24 cents per gallon for gas.

Avoid unnecessary idling. It wastes fuel, costs you money, and pollutes the air. Turn off the engine if you anticipate a wait.

Use overdrive gears and cruise control when appropriate. They improve fuel economy when you're driving on the highway.

Minimize the need to brake by anticipating traffic conditions. Be alert for slow-downs and red lights. Anticipate bends and turns on familiar roads. Letting up on the gas often eliminates the need for braking.

Avoid jackrabbit starts and stops. Avoiding these can increase your mpg and prolong the life of your brakes.

Use the air conditioner only when you absolutely need it. Air conditioning dramatically reduces fuel economy. Most air conditioners have an “economy” setting that allows the circulation of unchilled air. Many also have a “maximum” or “recirculation” setting that reduces the amount of hot outside air that must be chilled. Both settings can reduce the air conditioning load — and save gas.

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.

Remove excess weight from the trunk. An extra 100 pounds in the trunk can reduce a typical car’s fuel economy by up to two percent.

Avoid packing items on top of your car. A loaded roof rack or carrier creates wind resistance and can decrease fuel economy by five percent.

At the Garage

Keep your engine tuned. Tuning your engine according to your owner’s manual can increase gas mileage by an average of four percent.

Keep your tires properly inflated and aligned. It can increase gas mileage up to three percent, improve handling, and prolong the life of your tires. Check your owner’s manual or the door jamb for the proper level of inflation (not the tire itself, which shows the maximum tire inflation pressure); check the tire pressure when the tires are cold, because internal pressure increases when the car has been on the road for a while and the tires heat up.

Change your oil. According to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), you can improve your gas mileage by using the manufacturer’s recommended grade of motor oil. Motor oil that says “Energy Conserving” on the performance symbol of the American Petroleum Institute contains friction-reducing additives that can improve fuel economy.

When Shopping

Be skeptical about any gizmo that promises to improve your gas mileage. The EPA has tested 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 on energy efficiency at the gas pump and throughout the house, check out *Saving Starts @ Home: The Inside Story on Conserving Energy*.

The FTC works to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. To file a complaint or get free information on consumer issues, visit ftc.gov or call toll-free, **1-877-FTC-HELP** (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261. Watch a video, *How to File a Complaint*, at ftc.gov/video to learn more. The FTC enters consumer complaints into the Consumer Sentinel Network, a secure online database and investigative tool used by hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.