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# Petrol Saving Tips (money too!)

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With the recent fuel price hike, many was looking for extra money to fill up their gas tanks. Here's a few suggestion on how to save petrol and going greener.

## 1. Driving

### Weight

No matter what the weight of their car, some people just make their cars even heavier by carrying lots of unnecessary things – thereby needing more energy to make the car move. This also includes carting around heavy people – if they're just being a dead weight and making you use more fuel – get them to walk instead! Remember that if carrying extra weight, your tyre pressures should be higher – see your car's manual.

### Aerodynamics

Anything that interrupts the smooth flow of air past your car needs to be addressed. The obvious culprit here is roof racks/luggage carriers/roof boxes. You may think that carrying skis around on your roof all year round makes you look cool and trendy but it's just burning a hole in your wallet and the ozone layer – take roof racks off if not in use. Windows are also bad! – open windows drastically reduce your fuel efficiency – so keep them closed unless you've got a very good reason to keep them open.

If you really must tow a caravan or high trailer, then apart from annoying every motorist behind you, you're fighting the first two principles of fuel efficiency – low weight and good aerodynamics – consider fitting an aerofoil to the roof of your vehicle to minimise wind resistance.

Finally, body kits or extras that are added to the outside of a vehicle will also affect the aerodynamics of the car and contribute to extra weight. But more importantly body kits look rubbish so just avoid them completely. Manufacturers spend millions of pounds designing cars - why ruin them with a body kit?

### Sapping power

If you follow the above advice and don't open your windows, you'll be tempted to use the air conditioning to cool down – well think again. Air conditioning can increase fuel consumption by 10%, however the impact will be less if travelling at a constant speed on the motorway. So keep those fresh air vents open and wear minimal clothing when driving in summer! All accessories can drain energy and use more fuel, even the rear screen demister or the radio. If you want to be really super-keen, then in winter see if you've got the willpower to avoid turning on the engine and using the windscreen demister, and scrape off the ice or use a de-icer. An easier option may be to buy an insulating cover for the windscreen or keep the car undercover in the winter.

### Speed

No surprises that there's a direct link between burying your right foot on the accelerator and the amount of fuel burnt! Aim to perfect the art of gentle pressure on the accelerator and keep speeds down to achieve max mpg. Doing this could easily save hundreds of pounds per year. The faster you go over 70mph, the more the fuel burns away...

### Drive smoothly

Accelerating harshly then braking like a mad person is a sure way to devour the contents of your fuel tank, as well as ensuring you've got no brake disks or tread left on your tyres - as well as scaring passengers. By thinking and planning ahead you can apply light throttle and avoiding heavy braking, so reducing both fuel consumption and wear and tear. Try to predict traffic at junctions and when in queues avoid accelerating and then braking harshly. Driving techniques can affect car fuel efficiency by as much as 30 percent. Advanced driving techniques will help with smooth driving and will make you a safer driver – see [www.iam.org.uk](http://www.iam.org.uk)

### Gears

Driving in the highest gear possible without labouring the engine is a fuel-efficient way of driving. A car travelling at 40mph in third gear can use 25 percent more fuel than at the same speed in fifth gear. The fuel saving of coasting downhill in neutral or with the engine off will be negligible, but as the car will be out of control this can result in instant death, therefore this is not recommended.

### Stop and switch off

If you stop for more than a few minutes, switch off your engine – the ultimate in economy as you're using no fuel at all! However switching off your engine for short periods of time can increase fuel consumption, as it requires more fuel to get the engine started. Also your catalytic converter may no longer be running at full temperature, so your car will be less efficient, increasing the amount of pollution produced. Citroën have introduced this automatic feature on some models.

### Drive off promptly

After starting your car, rather than leaving your engine running, drive off as soon as possible to prevent wasting fuel. And to save money on replacing a worn-out engine, drive gently until the engine has reached its normal operating temperature.

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## 2. Running your car

### Tyres

If your tyres are under-inflated, you will use more fuel. This will also increase the rate of wear, which will also cost you more money. And apart from all that, it will affect your car's handling and therefore safety. Remember it's just those four patches of rubber that keep your car in contact with the road. A scary thought if driving a people carrier full of kids on under inflated-tyres. And it's estimated that about 50% of tyres on the road are under-inflated. Therefore tyre pressures should be checked against the recommended pressures regularly, ideally every one to two weeks.

Worn tyres will also decrease fuel efficiency, and impact on your safety again, so check the tread regularly. If you are replacing tyres then consider some of the newer 'Eco' tyres that are designed specifically to increase fuel efficiency.

### Regular Maintenance

Regular servicing of your car at the manufacturer's recommended service intervals will help to ensure it's running at its optimum efficiency. In particular, the following areas can make a big difference:

#### Air Filter

One of the most common reasons for a drop in fuel efficiency is a dirty intake filter. This will decrease the amount of air entering the cylinders of the engine resulting in incomplete combustion. Check the filter regularly to ensure that it is clean.

#### Spark Plugs

Ensure your spark plugs are in good condition. Renew the plugs and wires at intervals specified by the owner's manual. This will keep all cylinders firing properly resulting in higher efficiency.

#### Oil

Change the lubrication oil at intervals specified by the owner's manual. Use the recommended oil only especially in newer cars. Use of an engine flush before changing the oil will help to get rid of a lot of the dirt that collects in the engine that a normal oil change will not remove. On older engines it is advisable to use an oil treatment agent. This basically thickens the oil, which creates a better seal between the piston and the liner, preventing blow past and consequent loss of combustion pressure, resulting in higher fuel efficiency.

#### Exhaust

Replace exhausts with the type recommended by the manufacturer.

#### Full Service History

Older cars that haven't been looked after well will also fall short of their stated mpg. If buying one, look for a full service history.

## 3. Lifestyle

### Don't use your car!

Here's a sure-fire way to use less petrol – don't drive anywhere! Probably the best way to decrease the amount of petrol you burn is to leave the car at home, and take a bike, bus or train, or walk. A quarter of all car journeys in Britain are less than two miles long, and walking or cycling are cheap, clean and healthy alternatives.

### Don't use your car for short journeys

Short journeys waste more fuel than long journeys, so consider combining a number of stops if going out.

### Avoid travelling in rush hour traffic

Sitting in rush hour traffic causes pollution, wastes fuel, time and money, and generates stress. So avoid travelling in rush hour traffic if possible - set off early or late, or work from home if you're able to. And getting lost and driving around the M25 twice isn't a smart idea! Planning a quiet route that allows you to drive at a constant 50-60mph and avoids stop-start traffic will maximise fuel efficiency.

### Car share

Lots of cars carry only one person, so sharing car journeys with other people and using what would normally be free seats in a car can be a simple way of cutting the cost of driving and reducing congestion and pollution.

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