



SAVE POUNDS AT THE PUMP

As soaring fuel prices continue to hit the headlines, motorists cannot fail to be interested in ways to get the most miles out of every tank of petrol.

Regardless of your choice of vehicle, there are techniques you can use to save fuel and at the same time minimise your impact on the environment.

Ask yourself: “Do I really need to drive?”: Short journeys that are generally less than two miles cause the most pollution and are inefficient in terms of fuel consumption. A straining cold engine will produce 60 per cent more pollution than a warm one, because the catalytic convertor does not work efficiently until it is hot. Walk or cycle where possible instead.

Plan your route: Take the most direct route and go at off-peak times if possible to save fuel and time. Sitting in congestion means you are often doing zero miles per litre. Consider car sharing, Park and Ride schemes or public transport.

Have your vehicle serviced regularly: Inefficient, under-serviced engines can reduce fuel economy by 10 per cent or more. Catalytic convertors are environmentally friendly – but only if they are properly maintained.

Check your tyres: Correct tyre pressures reduce wear and helps fuel economy. Under-inflated tyres need replacing more often (itself an environmental problem) as well as being dangerous. Make a point of checking them at least once a week.

Obey the speed limits: Try to ‘feather’ the throttle when you reach your cruising speed. Doing 56mph uses 25 per cent less fuel than 70mph and a smoother driving style can bring significant fuel saving.

Reduce the drag factor: Remove roof racks and carriers when they’re not in use as well as unnecessary boot luggage and heavy accessories.

Driving with the window open and using air conditioning increases drag and lowers fuel economy, so use the vent settings instead.

Buy green fuel: And use less of it. If you get stuck in traffic, switch off the engine. Find out if you can buy low sulphur diesel (city diesel) or cleaner petrol (low sulphur/aromatics) locally.

Use “accelerator” sense: Save fuel by planning ahead and reading the traffic in advance to gently join a queue rather than braking suddenly as you hit traffic.

Reverse when you park: The engine will be cold and at its most fuel inefficient when you start it. If you can drive away without having to reverse when the engine is cold, you will save fuel and have better visibility.

Watch your levels: If you fill your fuel tank up to the brim, you may be carrying around additional fuel which in turn means that you have more weight on board than is necessary and this will itself reduce fuel efficiency.

SMOOTH OPERATOR

A good, safe drive is about a mixture of techniques, but high on the list must be the need to use the vehicle’s brakes in a smooth and progressive way. The IAM (Institute of Advanced Motorists) says drivers need to develop observation and anticipation, so that they can begin braking at an early stage and a leave a decent margin for braking more heavily if the need arises.

Many drivers tend to brake too late and too hard. Or arguably less dangerous, but equally annoying, some drivers have the habit of “comfort braking” – touching the brakes to enable themselves feel better, even if they have no intention of slowing the car to any measurable degree. They do so in the belief that they are being careful drivers.

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It is better by far to learn to read the road ahead. Not only do you get early warning of developing hazards, you can respond by adjusting your speed using only your throttle.

Have you ever seen a “cascade” of brake lights ahead of you? An advanced driver will judge the speed and distances involved and, having left a decent gap, be able to follow in safety by letting the speed “fall away” and so avoiding the need to brake.

Think too about your positioning on the road. Can you maximise your forward view by putting the vehicle in a slightly different position on the carriageway? This should not be an abrupt repositioning, but a smooth change in your line to enable you to see ahead that little bit better. Careful adjustment of road position improves the view ahead, particularly through corners.

Applying these techniques will also help save fuel.

REVERSE YOUR FUEL BILLS

Did you know you can save up to £2 of fuel per week by simply reversing your car into a parking space, so you drive away forwards? As well as positioning your vehicle into a safer position to pull away, there are many benefits to both your vehicle, and your pocket. Reverse when you park: The engine will be cold and at its most fuel inefficient when you start it. If you can drive away without having to reverse when the engine is cold, you will save fuel and have better visibility.

New data from the IAM Motoring Trust shows it takes an average five year old car a minute and a half for the engine to warm up and the most efficient way to warm it up is by driving it. Reversing out of a space when the car’s engine is cold uses around 20 to 25 times more petrol in the first few seconds than it does when warm. If you do this 10 to 12 times a week that adds up to a cost of about £100 a year, not to mention the increased wear on the car’s engine.

Reverse parking is also usually safer and is advised in The Highway Code. Reversing into somewhere you can see (a parking bay) rather than reversing out into somewhere you can’t see (often a line of moving traffic) is much safer. It is also easier to control a car going forwards than backwards when it is first started, and attempting a potentially high risk manoeuvre such as reversing when you have just entered a car and are not concentrating fully, is more dangerous.

From a security point of view, reversing close to an object such as a wall can make it more difficult for thieves to gain access and, if you need to leave a parking space quickly for personal security reasons, driving forward provides you with better acceleration and improved vision.

Many drivers find it helpful to lower the left (nearside) mirror to provide a guide to your lateral position. Another option, where all the parking spaces run in parallel rows, is to line your car up with the space in front and reverse back in a straight line. This should automatically position you in the centre of the space – but do remember to look where you are going!

SCREEN TEST

There’s no doubt that modern cars are structurally far superior to models widely available in years gone by. One of the recent trends in structural safety has had a possible downside in terms of driver vision – the growth of the A pillar.

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The A pillar is the engineering term for the area dividing the windscreen and the windows. In recent years the A pillars have become sturdier in a bid to improve the structure of the car as a whole.

In response, car designers have made them thicker. But the A pillar has created a blind spot which campaigners have pointed out obstructs the vision of thousands of drivers.

A study commissioned by the Department for Transport (DfT) from the Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) found that, while the A pillar can obscure vision, there is rarely only one factor that contributes to an accident.

The study therefore found that there was not enough evidence to suggest that changes to current legislation regarding A pillar design would be of benefit. That means the onus is on drivers to cater for possible A pillar restriction. So what should we do?

More than 90 per cent of the information from the car's external environment is viewed by the driver through the windscreen and windows. So, firstly, you should be aware of the potential restriction the A pillar may cause in your ability to scan the road ahead.

It is vital to check that nothing is hidden from view by the A pillar before making a manoeuvre. Pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists are easy to "lose" in the space behind a pillar. Make sure you take time to look around the pillar, not just take a quick "snap-shot" look which could allow a cyclist to be hidden from view. As you are driving in a straight line in approach to a junction, look further ahead, and scan to the left and right on your approach. That way you will see things through the windscreens before they become "lost" behind the pillars.

Remember – good, all round vision is vital. The onus is on you, as the driver, to see what is there.

More information about the DfT study [Click here](#)

<<http://www.dft.gov.uk/rmd/project.asp?intProjectID=11835>>

EMERGENCY VEHICLES

Deciding what to do when you hear an emergency vehicle approaching can be a dilemma. Do you stay where you are and potentially block the progress of an emergency vehicle? Or do you move into a position that may put you or other road users at risk?

Unfortunately, some drivers over-react to emergency service vehicles travelling on "blues and twos" (blue lights and two-tone horns). This is often because they don't hear or see the emergency vehicle until it's too close, and then take drastic action to get out of the way.

The IAM (Institute of Advanced Motorists) says that good driving practice will alert you early to emergency vehicles: regular mirror checks (side and rear) for example, and keeping the windows slightly down around town, so you can hear sirens approaching.

Don't panic and just brake. It's natural to want to react. But instinctively putting your brakes on immediately in front of an emergency vehicle doesn't help: it slows the progress of the emergency vehicle and jeopardises other road users.

Think about where you are on the road. You should deal with the problem in the same way that you deal with any other potentially hazardous driving situation. What is the safest option available to you?

Don't cross red traffic lights or speed to get out of the way. The emergency driver has training and legal exemptions that you don't have. Bus lanes and box junctions can be problems too, but let them resolve the problem of breaking the rules – not you.

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If you are moving it may well be that you can continue at a reasonable pace and the emergency vehicle can follow you out of a pocket of congestion (such as a blocked one way system). In that scenario, attempting to pull over too soon, or slow down, might just cause a needless obstruction and so hamper the progress of the emergency vehicle.

Indicate your intentions clearly don't pull in opposite other obstructions, such as centre bollards. If you are thinking about pulling over across an entrance to a school or factory, you may be unwittingly preventing the emergency vehicle reaching its destination. And do think about where you are asking the emergency driver to overtake you – on the brow of a hill or a blind bend can be placing him or her in a very difficult position.

Get out of the way as soon as you can do so in safety.

SHARING THE ROAD WITH CYCLISTS

Rising petrol costs have encouraged soaring cycle sales – so we are seeing cyclists on the roads with many different levels of experience. This presents issues for drivers; we need to take extra care to judge their speed – as well as the road and weather conditions – from the new cyclist's point of view.

Remember too that some cyclists, particularly younger ones, have never driven a car, and so don't recognise the problems that they can cause car drivers. In an accident involving a car and a cyclist, whoever is to blame, the cyclist will always be the more vulnerable to a serious injury.

These tips for motorists were prepared by the IAM (Institute of Advanced Motorists) with the National Cycling Strategy Board to avoid adding to the many cyclists killed or seriously injured each year.

- Cyclists don't have steel armour round them like we do. Passing them at speed within a foot of their elbow may feel perfectly safe from where you are, but it is very disconcerting when you are the cyclist.
- In traffic, make sure that you don't cut up a cyclist who is about to pass you on the near side. Don't try to cut across a cyclist when you need to turn left at a junction. Wait behind the cyclist until the cyclist has either turned left or passed the junction. And before you turn left after sitting at a red light, check your nearside mirror to make sure there isn't a cyclist moving down the inside.
- Park with care and prevent any passengers from opening a door until you are sure that there is no cyclist coming up on either side. Likewise, check over your shoulder to see there's no cyclist approaching before opening the driver's door. There might be one in your blind spot.
- Cyclists often ride at some distance from the kerb to avoid drains and potholes. Remember that their ability to signal is limited compared to ours, so try to anticipate what they might do from the position they have taken on the road.
- Advanced stop lines are for cyclists alone and should be respected, so leave the space between the two sets of stop lines empty, whether or not cyclists are occupying it when you arrive. If you see a cycle lane ending, road space is more scarce and that in turn can make a cyclist more vulnerable.
- Remember to use all your mirrors with extra care before changing direction when there are cyclists. Pay particular attention on roundabouts, where many accidents involving cyclists happen.

FUELS GOLD

If you are increasingly concerned about petrol costs after the recent price rises, ask yourself these questions next time you are driving. What is the delay time between lifting off the accelerator and applying the brake? And what gears are you using?

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You can improve fuel consumption and gain the environmental benefits of advanced driving by lifting off the accelerator earlier on your approach to traffic lights etc, and therefore reducing your braking at the end, because you have already lost speed.

Acceleration sense is about how you vary your foot pressure on the accelerator pedal so you don't have to brake as often or as hard.

Surprisingly to some, one of the key points of fuel efficient driving is accelerating briskly to a safe cruising speed and then taking the highest gear.

The longer you can avoid braking, the more you are using the momentum you've built up. It means thinking a bit further ahead of where you are. Most drivers tend to go straight from accelerator to brake – and that is when fuel consumption suffers.

Plan your arrival at roundabouts so that you decelerate for a longer period in a higher gear. That way you may not have to stop by allowing other traffic to clear before you get there.

And lastly, think long and hard about that overtake. Not only do you have to be entirely sure you can get past safely (important, to put it mildly) there is also the possibility that you are not gaining much in journey time. Advanced driving is all about thinking ahead, sometimes further than you can see.

MOBILE PHONE FINES INCREASE CAR INSURANCE

News that a car insurance company has decided to penalise drivers with points on their licence from a hand-held mobile phone offence is an excellent development, according to road safety experts at the IAM (Institute of Advanced Motorists).

It raises some interesting issues, too: does three points on your licence because you committed a hand-held mobile phone offence make you more dangerous as a risk than three points for a "routine" speeding offence?

The answer, according to Allianz, is definitely yes. They describe the hand-held phone offence as a "dangerous and needless act".

So now those who persist with this dangerous hand-held habit will suffer the triple whammy: a fine, points on their licence, and an increase in the insurance premium when they renew.

It is now more than a year since the tougher penalties for hand-held mobile phone use were introduced. The Department for Transport (DfT) has said 185,000 drivers were caught using hand held phones in 2007. But the offence continues: according to Allianz, ten per cent of motorists admitted in a survey to using their mobile without a hands-free kit while they were behind the wheel.

THE TOUGHER PENALTY IS NOW A LARGER FINE, FROM £60 TO £100, WITH THREE PENALTY POINTS.

There has never been a better time to invest in a Bluetooth hands-free kit, which are widely available at less than £30. Put bluntly, that's less than half the cost of the fine if you are caught.

By making sure that your Bluetooth hands-free kit is always in the car and charged you will be able to keep your phone on while driving, without running the risk of committing a hand-held offence. However, there is an important caveat here. Even when you have the hands-free habit, use it with care. Remember, even hands-free conversations are a major distraction, putting you and other road users at risk.

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But with Bluetooth on, you can make a point of telling callers that you are driving, and find somewhere legal, safe and convenient to pull over and continue your conversation.

OBSERVATION ON ROUNDABOUTS (PLAN TO STOP BUT LOOK TO GO)

It is not uncommon to come across drivers who go out of their way to avoid certain roundabouts. Even experienced drivers consider them to be “high risk” locations, and feel uncomfortable with them, no matter what size the roundabout is.

The single most common mistake at a roundabout is only looking to your right as you approach, because that is where you expect traffic to come from. But what about the car ahead of you – can that driver see something that you can't?

It is better to gather as much information as you can – start to check to your right, straight ahead, to your left, and all your mirrors as you approach the roundabout. By carrying out your observations in this sweeping/scanning motion, you are more likely to pick up if the car in front decides not to go for some reason.

The classic rear end shunt, caused by the driver ahead not going when you think he's going, can thus be avoided. Help yourself further by keeping a good gap between you and the vehicle waiting to move onto the roundabout, so if he changes his mind half way you have room to stop without compromising yourself.

Drivers often approach the roundabout with the plan to continue unless they have to stop because of other traffic. The problem here is that you may notice another car just as you get close to the roundabout, but you are more likely to speed up, opting to “take a chance” because it is difficult to change your mind at the last moment.

A slightly different, but very much more effective mental outlook is to approach the roundabout thinking “plan to stop but look to go”.

As you scan, remember you are looking for gaps, as well as vehicles.

And once you are on the roundabout, remember not everybody will position themselves correctly to get off: you could find somebody sweeping cross you to get to their exit. Remember that the lorry or bus needs lots of room, and try not to be actually alongside it.

On a mini roundabout, if you are approaching at the same time as an oncoming vehicle, clearly indicate your intention and then do a visual check – try to catch the driver's eye and send a message to avoid the ambiguous situation when nobody is quite sure who should go first.

ROAD MARKINGS AND PAINT

Drivers tend to ignore all but the most basic of road signs. A red light will still (thankfully) get most drivers to stop, most of the time. But a junction marking stating “STOP” in large capital letters is often ignored; at best it will be treated as a “give way” and then only by the locals who know the dangers well, but still opt to downgrade the risk in order to save a moment or two.

This may be because we all suffer from “signage overload”: there are so many instructions, official and unofficial, and so many direction signs and road signs competing for our attention that we already have our head full of information coming at us at eye level. That makes it easier to miss the ones painted on the tarmac beneath us.

Road users often seem totally unaware of the relevance of road markings, even when they see them.

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But as a rule of thumb, the more paint there is on the road surface, the more potential danger there is. Nobody has chosen to go to the time and expense (not to mention the considerable risk) of putting paint on the road without a reason.

Sadly even experienced motorists seem to be ignorant of the markings. I was recently told that a double white line down the middle of the carriageway was there to “stop us turning right across it.”

This is worrying, because those particular markings are there for quite a different purpose: to prevent vehicles crossing onto the other carriageway at that point.

Some cross-hatchings are no-go areas (those that have a surrounding solid white line). You should not use these areas unless it is a serious emergency or you are directed there by a police officer.

As well as the official marking on the road surface, there are the unofficial ones which can also serve to remind the observant driver of potential danger. The classic these days is the long, snaking skid mark. That means some unfortunate has had a crash, or a near miss, or certainly taken drastic action for some reason. When you see these, ask you self what might have happened, and see if there is anything you can do to prevent getting into the same situation.

A TURN FOR THE WORST – HOW TO ASSESS A BEND

Have you ever found yourself braking in a bend simply because it was sharper than you originally thought? If you have, then have a think about how you actually go about assessing the severity of bends. If you get it wrong, the consequences are potentially very serious, particularly on rural roads, which still dominate crash statistics.

And it is not just young, inexperienced drivers who get “caught out” by bends. It is here that, in the jargon, most “single vehicle accidents” take place.

There are a number of clues we can take from the environment to help us. The most obvious are the road signs and markings. There are other less obvious ones: the line of the trees, hedges, buildings, street lights or telegraph poles (although remember that sometimes telegraph poles run through fields, so don’t follow them!).

The actual width of the road can be a factor: the narrower it is, the less space you have to manoeuvre. Skid marks on the road are an indication of past mistakes. The position and speed of other traffic can also provide you with valuable information. Another particularly useful way of assessing a bend is to use the “limit point analysis”.

The limit point is the furthest point which you can see, i.e. where the left and right hand sides of the road appear to meet. To use this technique first make sure that you can stop before you get to it, then simply ask yourself: is it moving further away? If it is and you can see further ahead, then your speed should be fine. On the other hand if it is moving closer, then you could continue to reduce speed until the limit point begins to move with you and your view opens up again.

This technique takes a bit of practice but it will help you to link your speed with your range of vision and allow you to stop in the distance seen to be clear. And in roads where you can’t see through the bends it gives you a reliable and practical solution to a difficult judgement problem.

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GIVING AND TAKING

Being prepared mentally for what may happen next when you are on the road, rather than relying on reactions to sort out a problem when it has already arisen, is a key factor in safe driving and riding. By doing that you can also be prepared for what other road users around you might get wrong. Be ready to keep things safe by what you do to allow for them.

A bit of give and take goes a long way.

This is the opposite of the “blame culture”. Instead of mentally complaining because “that white van man just cut me up”, have a think about what you were doing beforehand and what you could have done, if anything, in a different way to prevent that near miss happening.

The IAM researched this approach with Brunel University two years ago. Using two control groups of drivers, plus a third coached to IAM standards, Brunel were able to evaluate the difference this approach made.

Those drivers who were prepared to see themselves as part of the potential hazard were less likely to be involved in a crash or a near miss than the drivers who just “blamed” other road users around them. Being alert to the possible mistakes of others may feel like a low priority when you are under pressure, or on a bad Monday morning perhaps. It’s easier to expect others to do what they should do, all the time. But there is no such thing as the perfect driver. Do your bit by allowing for their errors. And, if that feels too onerous, think about this: haven’t you, at some stage when you were driving made an error which someone else then made safe? Be honest – we all have.

So make a point of helping out the other road users who might do the same for you.

TAILGATING

Drivers who drive too close to the car in front (“tailgate”) are a menace. They probably don’t realise how intimidating their habit is. The most caring interpretation is that they are simply trying to indicate to the guy in front that they want to get past. That’s all very well, if the person in front has somewhere to go – but that isn’t always possible. Other lanes may be busy too, and it isn’t always an option to remove yourself instantly from the path of the tailgater.

Yet statistics tell us the single most common crash in the UK is the classic rear end shunt. So what can we do to avoid it?

The easiest thing to do is remove ourselves from the problem. Aim to change lanes on the motorway or dual carriageway, but only when it is safe to do so. **Clearly indicate your intention to pull over.** That way you can let the tailgater get past you, even if he or she is driving too fast for the conditions and/or breaking the speed limit.

Don’t be tempted to impose the speed limit on somebody who is clearly hell bent on breaking it. And if you choose not to let the tailgater past, there is a danger that he will try to “undertake” you, posing an additional risk for other road users.

We are often asked what you can do if you’re being tailgated in a 30mph zone on a single carriageway. Pulling over here may not be practical either. But do not be intimidated into speeding up just because

Somebody is right on your back bumper. Instead, create an additional stopping distance between you and the vehicle in front so that when you do brake, you can do so smoothly. Think of yourself as adding a little “buffer” zone for the tailgater, whether he appreciates it or not. When the time comes to brake,

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you can do so gently, giving a clear signal of your intention via your stop lights. **The more time your stop lights are on, the more time the tailgater has to register that and pull back.**

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