SimpleSteps

FOR BETTER HEALTH AND SUSTAINABLE LIVING

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Home » Ask Us » How Can I Get Better Mileage Out of My Old Car?

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Ask Us I believe that keeping my old, fuel-efficient car running in good condition can be greener than buying a newly manufactured replacement. Besides basic maintenance, what tips do you have to help maximize mileage? Do you recommend hypermiling?

Asked on Sunday, 4 October 2009by **Seth B.**

Luke Tonachel responds:

Good for you that you've kept your car in fine shape and are looking for ways to improve your mileage. Gas prices may be (temporarily) low now, but hypermiling—using an array of techniques to maximize miles per gallon—has garnered a fair amount of attention in the past couple of years. Although this has involved some arcane (and in some cases not entirely safe) tactics, the basic ideas behind hypermiling are common sense. Here are a few ways you can improve your mileage immediately.

Top Up Your Tires
To maximize your vehicle's fuel economy, make certain that your tires are always inflated to the recommended pressure. Purchase a pressure gauge so you know when it's time to add air. When replacing your wheels, opt for the new fuel-efficient tires. Due to new materials in these tires, they use less energy when rolling along the road but maintain excellent wear and traction characteristics. Major tire makers including Michelin, Goodyear and Bridgestone all offer fuel-efficient models.

Clear the Roof and the Trunk
Roof racks are convenient but can also create significant drag. When carrying clamshell storage containers, bikes or other burdens, you reduce your fuel efficiency by as much as 5 percent, so take them off the car roof when not needed. If you can remove the roof rack itself between uses, that will save you more. And if you're inclined to use your car as a spare closet—don't. The costs can add up quickly: for each 100 pounds on or in your car, you lose 1 to 2 percent of your fuel efficiency.

Don't Idle
One of the best ways to conserve energy when operating your vehicle is to make sure you don't leave your car idling. Shut off the engine if you are waiting for passengers, stopped at a train crossing, waiting for a drawbridge to be lowered or in similar situations. In particular, don't idle when you're picking up or dropping off children at school—this will lower kids' exposure to exhaust. And when it's cold outside, avoid excessively heating your car before you leave the house.

Stick to 60 or Less
The faster you push your vehicle, the more aerodynamic drag reduces engine efficiency. For every 5 miles an hour over 60, you reduce your gas mileage by 5 to 10 percent, according to the EPA. On the other hand, remember that driving significantly more slowly than the highway traffic around you can also be dangerous, so keep in the right-hand lane and be aware of other motorists.

Minimize Your Driving
Plan ahead before cruising around town to do errands. Minimize your driving by grouping your chores into a single trip and calculating an efficient route. Also, try cutting your car commuting by carpooling.

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