



OWNERSHIP & SAVINGS

How to Save Money at the Pump

Small habits, smarter fill-ups, and a simple log that shows you exactly where your fuel money goes.

A NOTE FROM OUR TEAM

Nobody can control what gas costs on the corner. But how you drive, how you maintain your vehicle, and where you fill up are all in your hands. We pulled every tip on this page from the Department of Energy and the FTC, not from internet folklore. Track it for a month and watch what happens.

— The Auto Advocate Team

Fuel is one of the few vehicle costs you pay every single week, which makes it one of the easiest places to find real savings. There's no magic additive and no secret gadget here. Just the habits the U.S. Department of Energy has actually measured, a few smart ways to pay less per gallon, and a log that turns guessing into knowing.

1 What the Numbers Say

These figures come from the Department of Energy and EPA's fueleconomy.gov. Your results will vary by vehicle and conditions.

15–30%

MILEAGE LOST TO
AGGRESSIVE DRIVING AT
HIGHWAY SPEEDS

10–40%

MILEAGE LOST IN STOP-AND-
GO TRAFFIC

¼–½ gal

FUEL BURNED PER HOUR OF
IDLING

~1%

MPG LOST PER EXTRA 100
LBS

2 Drive Like You're Paying for It

- 1 Ease off the gas and the brakes.** Speeding, jackrabbit starts, and hard braking cut mileage more than any other habit. Look ahead, leave space, and let the vehicle coast to a stop.
- 2 Watch your highway speed.** Mileage usually drops quickly above 50 mph. Fueleconomy.gov estimates that slowing down 5 to 10 mph can improve fuel economy 7% to 14%.
- 3 Use cruise control on the highway.** Holding a steady speed will save gas in most cases.
- 4 Turn it off when you're parked.** For stops longer than about a minute, shutting the engine off usually saves fuel. Modern starters and batteries handle restarts far better than older ones did.
- 5 Skip the long warm-up.** The Department of Energy notes that driving warms the engine faster than idling. Give it about 30 seconds, then drive off gently.
- 6 Empty the trunk and the roof.** Extra weight costs mileage, and a large rooftop cargo box can cut highway fuel economy far more. Take it off when you're not using it.

FROM THE INSIDE

Our team has spent years on the dealership side of the desk, and we've watched plenty of buyers fall for a big truck on the lot without once asking what it costs to fill up. Every new vehicle's window sticker shows its EPA fuel economy, and fueleconomy.gov lets you compare annual fuel cost side by side. Do that comparison at home, before the test drive. Once you're behind the wheel, emotion tends to do the shopping.

3 Maintenance That Pays You Back

Tire pressure

Underinflated tires lower mileage by about 0.2% for every 1 psi drop. Use the pressure on your door-jamb sticker, never the maximum printed on the tire. Check monthly, when the tires are cold.

The right oil

Using the manufacturer's recommended oil grade can improve mileage 1% to 2%. Using a heavier grade than your engine was designed for can lower it. Look for "Energy Conserving" on the label.

Check engine light

A lit check engine light can mean a problem that hurts fuel economy and raises emissions. Get it diagnosed instead of driving around it.

Air filter myth

On modern fuel-injected engines, replacing a clogged air filter does *not* improve fuel economy, though it can help acceleration. Replace it on schedule, but don't expect a mileage miracle.

4 The Octane Myth

Premium is not "better gas" for an engine that doesn't need it. Octane measures a fuel's resistance to engine knock, not its power or cleanliness. Fueleconomy.gov notes most gasoline vehicles are designed to run on 87 octane, and that under normal driving, a higher grade gives little to no benefit. The FTC puts it bluntly: unless your engine knocks on the recommended grade, buying higher octane is a waste of money.

The rule is simple: use the octane your owner's manual requires. Not lower, not higher.

KNOW THE DIFFERENCE

- **"Premium required"** means use it. A lower grade can cause poor running and, over time, engine and emissions damage.
- **"Premium recommended"** means read your manual closely and decide with your eyes open.
- **"87 octane"** means buying premium just spends more per gallon.

5 Pay Less Per Gallon

- ☐ Join a grocery or fuel rewards program and stack points on everyday purchases
- ☐ Price-check warehouse club fuel if you already pay for a membership
- ☐ Use a gas price app before you leave, not after you're on empty
- ☐ Ask whether the station charges more for credit than for cash or debit
- ☐ Pay with a card that earns cash back on fuel, then pay it off in full
- ☐ Fill up during errands you were already running (see **No. 34, Map Your Day**)

WATCH OUT

Driving across town for a few cents a gallon can cost more than it saves. Do the math first: **gallons you'll buy × price difference = your savings**. **Extra round-trip miles ÷ your MPG × price per gallon = what the detour costs**. If the second number is bigger, stay close to home.

YOUR 60-SECOND FILL-UP ROUTINE

- ☐ Write down the odometer before you pump
- ☐ Fill completely so your MPG math is accurate
- ☐ Use the grade your owner's manual calls for
- ☐ Glance at all four tires; check pressure monthly when cold
- ☐ Scan in your rewards card or app before you pay
- ☐ Log it below before you pull away

6

Fill the tank completely each time, then write down the odometer. $MPG = \text{miles since last fill-up} \div \text{gallons added}$. $\text{Cost per mile} = \text{total paid} \div \text{miles driven}$.

[illegible]

Starting average MPG _____ After 4 weeks _____ Monthly fuel spend _____

A sudden drop in MPG with no change in driving is a signal: check tire pressure first, then have the vehicle looked at.

The right vehicle saves more than any habit ever will.

Driving gently might improve your mileage a few percent. Choosing the right vehicle at the right price can change your monthly costs for years. With the Buyer Brief, we research rebates, incentivized rates, and fair pricing on the vehicles that truly fit how you drive, and include a trade-in valuation on what you own now.

Buyer Brief \$99

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THE DEALERSHIP HAS EXPERTS. NOW YOU DO, TOO.

SOURCES

U.S. Department of Energy & EPA, Driving More Efficiently: fuelconomy.gov/feg/driveHabits.jsp
U.S. Department of Energy & EPA, Keeping Your Vehicle in Shape: fuelconomy.gov/feg/maintain.jsp
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Federal Trade Commission, The Low-Down on High Octane Gasoline (Facts for Consumers): govinfo.gov/app/details/GOVPUB-FT-PURL-LPS39101
U.S. Department of Energy, Consumer Guide to Vehicle Idling: energy.gov

This guide is for general educational purposes. Fuel savings vary by vehicle, driving conditions, and fuel prices. Always follow your owner's manual for fuel grade, oil, and tire pressure.