



# **GAS WATCHER'S GUIDE**

*Tips for Conserving Fuel,  
Saving Money and  
Protecting the Environment*





## Gas Watcher's Guide

Responsible use of energy is learned behavior. To conserve, we must slow down and find ways to do more with less. The benefits of fuel conservation include financial savings, improved road safety and a cleaner environment. This brochure offers ways to be a consistent and effective “gas watcher.”

## Better Vehicles

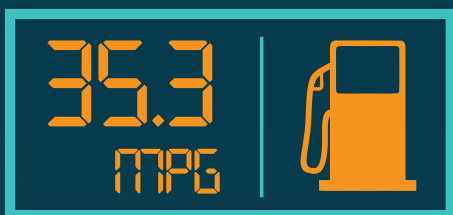
In recent decades, automobile manufacturers have made significant advances in improving the overall energy efficiency of passenger vehicles. At the same time, consumers are more aware of how much fuel their vehicles consume and how fuel economy affects their pocketbooks and the environment. Today, the average fuel efficiency of new U.S. passenger vehicles and light trucks is about 35.3 miles per gallon, with the federal government projected goal to achieve 54.5 by 2025.

## More Time Behind the Wheel

Motorists also are driving more. According to the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, Americans on an average day drive 31 miles and spend some 50 minutes behind the wheel. The typical vehicle is driven about 11,435 miles per year, and annual per-vehicle gasoline use totals approximately 562 gallons.

## Nationally Speaking . . .

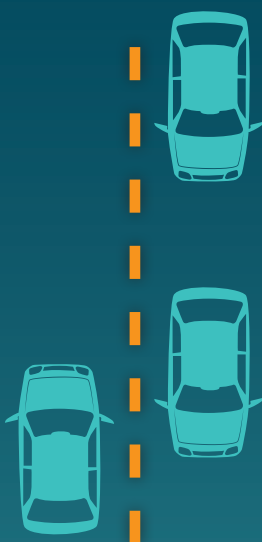
Passenger vehicles and light trucks average



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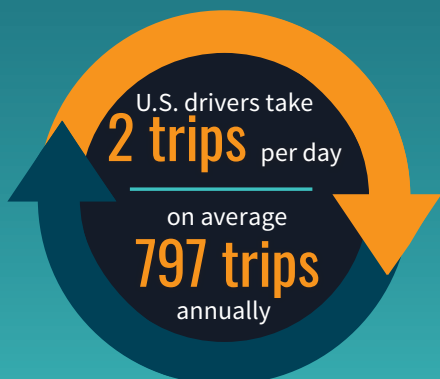


behind the wheel each day.



# 64%

of all miles driven are done by drivers with no passengers in their vehicle



## Plan Ahead

The type of car or truck you drive, how it's maintained and how you drive can significantly affect fuel economy. Here are some tips to help you save gasoline and money:

- ▶ When buying a new vehicle, choose one that meets your normal daily needs. While a large family might need a V8-powered sport utility vehicle, a solo commuter is better off economically in a 4-cylinder compact. You can always rent a larger vehicle, should the need arise.
- ▶ If you own more than one vehicle, use the more energy-conserving model as often as possible.
- ▶ Consolidate and plan your trips to cut down on time behind the wheel and miles traveled. This can also be accomplished by finding a “one-stop destination” where you can take care of banking, grocery shopping and other common errands.
- ▶ Comparison-shop by phone, online or through ads, rather than driving from store to store.
- ▶ Lighten the load by not hauling unnecessary items in the vehicle's passenger compartment, trunk or cargo area. Moving more weight requires more gas.
- ▶ Use air conditioning conservatively. With automatic climate control, set the system to a higher temperature. Some systems have an “economy” setting that reduces the amount of cooling delivered and fuel consumed.
- ▶ Watch for lower fuel prices, but don't waste gas driving to a distant filling station to save a few cents.



## Think It Through

Your driving style can have nearly as much impact on fuel economy as the type of car you drive. Remember the following:

- ▶ Don't idle a cold engine for an extended time. Cars today can be safely driven almost immediately after starting. Doing so speeds the warm-up process and produces fewer exhaust emissions. Just remember to avoid hard acceleration until the engine reaches operating temperature.
- ▶ For the best fuel economy, maintain steady speeds. A car burns extra fuel during acceleration. Use cruise control when appropriate to help maintain a constant speed.
- ▶ Avoid quick starts and sudden stops. They waste fuel, are hard on your vehicle and increase the risk of a crash.
- ▶ Minimize the need to brake by anticipating traffic conditions. Be alert for slowdowns and red lights ahead of you, and decelerate by coasting whenever practical.
- ▶ Travel at moderate speeds on the open road. Higher speeds require more fuel to overcome air resistance. But, remember that driving slower than the flow of traffic can create a traffic hazard. Stay in the right lane, except when passing another vehicle.



## Consider the Total Cost of Ownership

Fuel is a significant cost of vehicle ownership, so gas mileage ratings should be carefully considered when choosing a new vehicle. Compare the Environmental Protection Agency estimated fuel economy ratings of the vehicles you're considering. Other factors to think about include:

- ▶ Four-wheel-drive and all-wheel-drive vehicles generally use more fuel than their rear-wheel-drive and front-wheel-drive counterparts.
- ▶ Some modern automatic transmissions provide better fuel economy than a manual transmission in the same car.
- ▶ Smaller engines usually provide better gas mileage than larger ones.
- ▶ Vehicle engines that require premium fuel, as stated in the owner's manual, will cost more to operate.



- ▶ Trucks, vans and SUVs often come in several sizes and configurations. Models with smaller cabs, shorter beds or smaller cargo areas generally are lighter and consume less fuel.
- ▶ Light exterior and interior colors, along with tinted windows, can lessen heat buildup inside the car and reduce the need for air-conditioning use.

When shopping for a new or pre-owned vehicle, check out AAA's annual *Your Driving Costs* booklet, available at your local AAA office or downloadable at [exchange.aaa.com/automotive](http://exchange.aaa.com/automotive). Also, visit [AAA.com](http://AAA.com) for other helpful information and detailed vehicle comparisons. Many AAA clubs also offer auto-buying services that can help save you money on the vehicle you choose.





## Maintain Fuel Efficiency

Check the owner's manual for your car's recommended maintenance schedule, and keep the following points in mind:

- ▶ Perform required maintenance as specified. Keeping tires properly inflated, moving components adequately lubricated and ignition and emission systems in good operating condition will help ensure maximum fuel efficiency and extend the life of your vehicle.
- ▶ Change engine oil at the intervals indicated by the in-car maintenance reminder system or factory schedule. Use an "energy-conserving" oil that meets the vehicle manufacturer's specifications.
- ▶ Keep tires inflated at the proper pressure. Use the figures on the tire information decal on the driver's door jamb – not the ones molded into the tire's sidewall. Under-inflated tires reduce fuel economy and can be a safety hazard.
- ▶ Check the engine air filter at every oil change. A dirty filter won't affect fuel economy on a modern fuel-injected car, but it will reduce engine performance.
- ▶ Engine spark plugs must be in good condition. Some types last for 100,000 miles, but others need to be replaced more often.



- ▶ Have your vehicle serviced as soon as possible if the “check engine” light comes on. Take the car to a shop *immediately* if the light begins to flash on and off.
- ▶ Have all maintenance performed by a certified technician who is trained to inspect other important vehicle components that affect fuel consumption.

## At the Pump

If your vehicle’s engine does not require premium fuel, using anything other than regular is simply a waste of money. Other tips include:

- ▶ Don’t top off your gas tank. Stop filling after the automatic nozzle shuts off the second time. In hot weather, expanding fuel can flood and impair important emission control devices.
- ▶ If you have to replace a gas cap, make sure it is the right one for your car. An ill-fitting cap will increase emissions and trigger the “check engine” light.
- ▶ Keep track of gas mileage. If you notice a sudden decrease in fuel economy, have your vehicle checked by a technician to ensure it is operating properly.





## Vacationing

Some 90 percent of Americans vacation by personal vehicle. Chances are, you're one of them. These tips will help save fuel and reduce hassles on your trip:

- ▶ If you have a choice of vehicles, take the one that gets the best gas mileage. Renting a more fuel-efficient model also can save you money in the long run — both at the pump and by reducing wear and tear on your personal vehicle.
- ▶ Choose a route that enables you to travel at constant speeds and bypass congested areas as much as possible. Unless you're taking a scenic drive, avoid two-lane roads that have lots of stop signs and traffic signals. Your AAA Travel representative can help plan the best route and provide you a customized TripTik routing that has door-to-door driving directions, or you can visit [AAA.com/TTP](http://AAA.com/TTP) and create your own.
- ▶ Start trips early in the day while traffic is light. Plan meal stops to coincide with likely periods of traffic congestion.
- ▶ Take only what you need to maintain as light a load as possible. Keep luggage inside the vehicle, rather than strapped on the roof, where it will create added wind resistance.
- ▶ Choose a vacation spot where minimal driving will be needed after you arrive.
- ▶ If your trip seems too far to drive the whole way, consider using public transportation or air travel, then rent a vehicle at your destination.

## Saving Money While Making Money

Transportation to and from work is one of the most obvious places to save fuel and money. Consider these options:

- ▶ When possible, combine errands with your daily commute.
- ▶ If your work hours are flexible, leave earlier in the morning or return home later in the evening to reduce fuel burned in bumper-to-bumper traffic.
- ▶ Talk to your employer about working from home one day a week. This can significantly reduce your fuel consumption over the course of a year.
- ▶ Participate in a carpool or ride-sharing program. Many families carpool to transport children to and from school or activities. Starting a carpool can be as easy as talking to neighbors who travel to the same destination, or posting a notice on a company or school bulletin board.
- ▶ When available, public transit is usually the least-expensive and most fuel-efficient way to commute. It may take a little longer to get where you're going, but you'll save money and reduce emissions.
- ▶ For short trips, try bicycling or walking. You'll save fuel, and your body will thank you for the exercise.



# AAA and Fuel Conservation

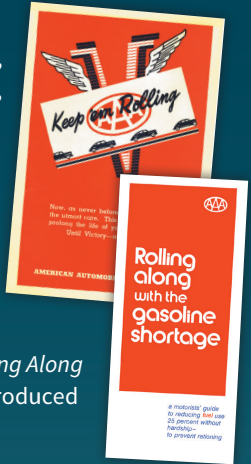
AAA is a federation of motor clubs serving more than 57 million members in the United States and Canada with automotive, travel, financial and insurance services.

For decades, AAA has published public-service guides on car care, fuel economy and safety. In 1943, AAA published its first guide, *Keep 'em Rolling*, to assist with gasoline rationing required by World War II.

In the 1970s, when American motorists faced soaring gas prices brought on by the Arab Oil Embargo, AAA published *Rolling Along with the Gasoline Shortage* and produced its first *Gas Watcher's Guide*.

A companion brochure, *Your Driving Costs*, has been produced since 1950. That year, driving a car 10,000 miles cost 9 cents per mile, and gasoline sold for 27 cents per gallon.

Consult your local AAA club or visit [AAA.com](http://AAA.com) or [GasPrices.AAA.com](http://GasPrices.AAA.com) for more information on conserving fuel and traveling safely.



AAA Association Communication  
1000 AAA Drive  
Heathrow, FL 32746-5063

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