

## **Fuel foolery**

Pills, magnets no miracle cures for pricey gas

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Everyone, it seems, is looking for the magic cure for sticker shock at the pump.

Check your e-mail inbox of late, and chances are you've received a missive urging a national gas strike day. Another campaign calls for changing habits to only buy from smaller multi-national concerns (i.e., ones not named Exxon).

Or there are the magazine ads hawking magnets that affix to cars and cause better mileage by "aligning gas molecules" so fuel burns more efficiently.

And in recent weeks, flyers appeared on cars all over the area offering a wondrous gas pill that promised - at \$40 a bottle and up - to cut users' gas costs by 25 percent or more.

"I think the gas magnet has got to be my favorite one, by far, because of the great pseudo-science it uses. Aligning molecules ... that's great," said Ron Hollenbeck, co-author of the newly published "The Gas Mileage Bible," which advised more realistic steps such as proper tire inflation and maintenance to decrease gas consumption.

"With the gas pill, you will see some improvement because it does clean out your engine, but it wears off pretty fast. And those e-mails have been around for years because it satisfies a feeling of self-righteous outrage, like you're actually getting people to do something about high gas prices."

The reason those calls-to-arm never work, economists say, is such movements only shift demand for oil instead of cutting it, which is the only way to bring prices down long-term.

"Those things are myths that have been around for years, and customers would have to be extraordinarily disciplined in their efforts in order to have any effect," said Mark Perry, a professor of business and economic finance at the University of Michigan-Flint.

"There are no examples in the history of the world of something like that working without cutting overall demand as well. And because the economies of China and India are growing by up to 10 percent a year, the demand for oil is greater than ever."

Perry does offer some good news for drivers with thin wallets. Global oil prices forecasts for the next two years have crude prices staying flat, which suggests, barring a Hurricane Katrina-level supply shock, no dramatic increase in prices.

And even at \$3 a gallon, we're still far below the cost in countries such as Great Britain and Belgium, where

prices average more than \$6 per gallon.

Still, the price hikes in recent years combined with "buying an SUV at the wrong time" causes a fair amount of frustration for Swartz Creek resident Aaron Broadworth.

"If I forget something at home that I need for work (in downtown Flint) I can't run back and get it because the drive costs so much," he said. "It's so bad because you used to be able to time buying gas with the price drops on Wednesday nights, but it doesn't seem like that happens anymore."

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