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## Consumers share tips to reduce fuel usage

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Timothy Freed doesn't feel the pinch quite as strongly as others.

But it still makes him wince.

After all, he can without hesitation state how many gallons of gasoline are required to fill the fuel tank of his Ford pickup.

"Twenty-five gallons," he said. "Pretty big tank, and a lot of money."

Since last fall, Freed, 19, has relied on his truck to transport him each weekday from his home in Peru to classes at Illinois Valley Community College in Oglesby, as well as to Grizzly Jack's Grand Bear Lodge in Utica, where he works as a cook.

But this spring, as the price of gasoline has again shot back up to nearly \$3 per gallon, and analysts have predicted that the price will likely go higher still, Freed's driving habits and those of his friends have become even more curtailed.

"Car-pool," said Freed. "That's the thing.

"Me and my friends, none of us can really afford to just drive on our own for fun. So we find a larger vehicle and we all pile in and drive to where we're going together."

Throughout the nation, many people have begun to re-evaluate their driving habits and more closely monitor their vehicles' fuel efficiency as gas prices threaten to eclipse last summer's costs.

That number includes Ocean Wheeler, 32, a resident of Scottsdale, Ariz., who is taking classes at IVCC while visiting his grandmother for a few months in Princeton.

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"I drive a Jeep Cherokee," he said. "And it gets pretty bad **gas mileage**.

"Don't get me wrong. I can afford to pay it, but I've still cut back a lot on unnecessary trips and all.

"I think about my driving a lot more."

And that, say those who know cars, is the key for most consumers in reducing their fuel expenditures this summer.

"You could drive less; that would definitely save money," said Art Koudelka, automotive technology instructor at IVCC. "But that's not really reasonable for most people."

Instead, Koudelka said the advice he often dishes out to those asking about how to improve fuel economy can be summarized in one phrase: proper maintenance.

"In today's cars, computers can adjust for a lot of problems in the engine," said Koudelka. "But that means, most of the time, people are driving with under-serviced engines, which means they're burning a lot more fuel than they should be."

He said common problems include faulty spark plugs, poor wheel alignment, clogged air filters, dirty fuel injectors or even brake problems.

But proper maintenance is just the start, said Ron Hollenbeck, a Houston-area author and self-avowed "automotive junkie."

With partner Kenny Joines, Hollenbeck recently completed "The **Gas Mileage Bible**," a book written to help motorists saddled with "gas guzzlers" squeeze fuel economy from their engines.

Like Koudelka, Hollenbeck endorsed regular routine maintenance, such as tuning an engine and keeping a vehicle's tires inflated to the proper pressure.

But Hollenbeck said car owners can find the greatest amount of savings in one instrument: their foot.

He noted that many drivers have developed driving habits that are contrary to producing good fuel economy from their vehicles.

"People are always running late, driving fast, accelerating faster, only to slam on the brakes and start it all over again," he said. "People have got to understand: You can do all the work you want on a car, but if you drive like that, you can just throw it all out the window."

The point is not lost on Kelly Abrahams, 20, of Spring Valley.

While her parents pay to fuel her car while she is in college, Abrahams said she is aware of how much fuel she uses.

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"And I drive kind of fast," she said with a laugh. "So that probably means I use even more than I should."

Hollenbeck estimated that just by backing off the accelerator and keeping their cars properly maintained, most drivers could cut fuel use by 20 percent to 30 percent.

And that, he said, could translate to hundreds of dollars saved every year.

Koudelka echoed that sentiment.

But he said many consumers could also save **gas** by simply not idling their cars as often.

"It's just silly," he said. "If you're getting out of your car for any reason, just shut it off, because all you're doing is burning gas."

Koudelka said he practices all of those things.

But he has also found himself, like Freed, finding more excuses not to drive -- or more particularly, not to drive his GMC Jimmy SUV.

"I know how much **gas** that uses," he said. "So I've been finding ways to take my wife's Honda and not my Jimmy."

### **Cutting Back on Fuel Consumption**

Ron Hollenbeck, author of the new book "The **Gas Mileage Bible**," offers five steps any driver can undertake tomorrow to increase fuel economy by 20 to 30 percent.

1. Be concious of the way you drive. Slow down. Drive less aggressively.
2. Get a tuneup.
3. Check your tire pressure.
4. Purchase and install a replacement air filter in place of a standard paper air filter.
5. Remove excess weight from the vehicle and remove features like overhead cargo carriers and luggage racks.

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