

“Re-Fueling my Wallet”¹ **Commentary**

I don't know if the gasoline industry conspires to gouge us or not. I have my opinions about environmental regulations, the lack of new refineries, restricted oil drilling, dependence on foreign oil, and federal leadership concerning comprehensive energy strategies. But, these don't help me today when I plunk down \$60 for a tank of gas.

Let me first confess: I don't like to change. However, the latest run up in gasoline prices has forced me to finally consider how I drive. Why? Because one thing I can control is gasoline usage....and I'm cheap. Over the last year I've experimented with our faithful 1995 Oldsmobile Silhouette van. This vehicle basically takes me to and from work, primarily by freeway. Since it's used for little else, it provides a great opportunity for a controlled road test.

Over several tanks of regular, unleaded gas, I carefully checked my mileage. Then, I changed how I drove and went through several more tanks of gas. The two major differences I made were: never drive over 65; and never use the air conditioning. I realize these two are sacrosanct to many, but remember, I'm cheap. Some smaller changes I made were to stop jackrabbit starts and to not rely completely on braking to slow down. Though I expected improvement, I was excited to find for my 20 gallon tank, that mileage went from 385 to 485 miles. For the mathematically challenged, this was over a 25% improvement! More concretely, this is the equivalent of having 5 free gallons of gas – over \$15 per tank just by changing a few key habits.

To show this wasn't a fluke, I repeated the test (with and without changes) several times. The results were virtually the same. Other things you can do for smaller gas mileage improvements are: keep your tires inflated correctly, remove unnecessary dead weight, and keep your car engine well maintained.

Do I think the current gasoline prices are justified or will drop significantly? Do I trust the oil companies or the federal government to help us out – I'm not holding my breath! Besides voicing our opinions to affect policies in the future, we can practice some improved stewardship of resources right now to affect our bottom line costs. It comes down to what's more important, comfort or savings. I'll continue to push for reasonable policies on the environment, reducing our dependence on foreign oil, and forcing our leadership to do their job, but in the meantime, I can save cold, hard cash by denying myself a little convenience.

Frank Kacer
San Diego

¹ First published in the July 2007 issue of Good News Etc.