

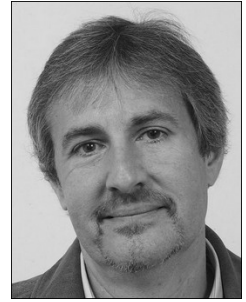


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Taking the Long Way Home

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ECO NOTES



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My mom always said the journey is as important as the trip. She obviously learned this little gem long before the interstates were built. In her day, seeing the occasional Tyrannosaurus or Triceratops lumber down the road was all the traffic she had to worry about. (Just kidding, Mom!) It's hard to think of driving down I-26 or I-95 as an enjoyable journey. The object of the interstate system is to get as quickly as possible to your destination. (Unless you enjoy counting McDonald's signs.)

But last year I had to go to Raleigh to take an excruciating two day test. The good news for me was that after the torture was over; I was headed to the beach to meet my family. When I finally hit the road, I was immediately stuck in a traffic jam with 4 hours of driving ahead. I quickly pulled out a map, found a parallel side road and pulled off the exit ramp. The road turned out to be a wonderful country drive past rolling hills, farmland and small towns. People waved and smiled at each other. No tailgating, swerving and high speed action here. When I reached the place where I could get back onto the interstate, I kept on driving. I might have arrived later than I would have barreling down the highway, but instead I arrived refreshed and rejuvenated after a hard week. I also saved nearly a tank of gas.

At nearly \$4 a gallon and rising, maybe there is wisdom in my mother's credo after all. Taking the longer way might save our mental health and a substantial amount of gas to boot. To help those of us trying to survive in a world of gourmet gas blends as well as protecting our planet from damaging car emissions and the entire fossil fuel process, here are some tips I've gathered on economical driving:

- 1) **Strive not to Drive:** This is not easy in the country with limited mass transportation options. It requires conscious decisions to double or triple up on trips so we limit our driving for necessities. Look into Apple Country Transportation which provides public transportation, subscription and dial-a-ride transportation services for residents of Henderson County. They can be reached at (828) 698-8571.
- 2) **Take the Long Way Home or Drive Slower:** Driving at slower speeds saves gas, saves lives, and makes the driving experience more pleasurable. Generally speaking, each 5 mph you drive over 60 mph is like paying an additional \$0.30 per gallon for gas.
- 3) **Braking wastes energy.** Lots of it. You get that energy back if you brake less by stopping accelerating sooner, and not having to accelerate afterwards. Anticipate corners and back off early, driving smoothly through them.
- 4) **Don't carry more than you need to in the car.** An extra 100 pounds in your vehicle could reduce your MPG by up to 2%. Ditch the baby grand piano in the trunk and save some cash.
- 5) **Maintain Your Car.** Improve your fuel economy by doing a few small checkups on your car, such as changing the oil regularly and having the engine tuned. Maintain the proper tire pressure in your tires. An out-of-tune engine can increase fuel consumption by 15 percent.
- 6) **Avoid Aggressive Driving.** Excessive braking, speeding and sudden speed changes all waste gas. Driving like a maniac will cost you big money. While on the highway, keep your cruise control on and avoid following other cars too closely, which may lead to unnecessary braking. My mechanic always tells me, drive as if you have an egg under your gas pedal. Easy does it, or it's over easy.
- 7) **Upgrade to a Better Motor Oil.** Switching to a high-performance, synthetic motor oil saves both gas and dough. According to independent tests, upgrading motor oil can improve fuel economy by 5 percent.
- 8) **Keep Your Cap On.** Missing, damaged, and loose gas caps cause 147 million gas gallons to vaporize each year, according to Auto Service Operator magazine. Every time drivers refuel, they should eye their gas caps. A quick visual inspection can ensure that the gas in the tank does not vanish into thin air.
- 9) **Shut off the Engine When Stopped.** A minute of idling consumes more gas than a restart. So, whenever you expect to be stopped for a minute or more, shut off the ignition. Not necessarily at every red light you come to, but definitely when standing in a bank drive-up line or picking up your kid from school. If it looks like a long wait without moving, turn off that engine. Note that the new gas/electric hybrid vehicles automatically shut off the gas engine in most conditions if the vehicle is stopped for even a few seconds. They restart instantly as the gas pedal is applied. The engineers who designed those hybrids know the fuel-saving value of shutting off an engine.
- 10) **Buy a more fuel efficient car:** A vehicle that gets 30 MPG will cost approximately \$1000 less in fuel each year than one that gets 20 MPG according to www.fueleconomy.gov. Over a period of 5 years, the 30 MPG vehicle will save you \$5000.

ECO's Energy Committee is continuing work on Project Green Light, our energy conservation program linking with churches throughout the county. Join ECO for its Project Green Light orientation on October 21st at 7:00 PM at the Hendersonville Public Library or talk to your church about joining in this community-wide effort to cut our energy footprint, save money and become better stewards of creation.

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