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Fuel Efficiency for Summer Vacations

Summer is officially here! That means vacation season is upon us - trips to the cottage, to the beach, and often to places much further away. And as exciting as it is to plan family vacations, in the current fuel price environment, it is not so thrilling to think about how much the trip will cost in gas.

But don't despair, if purchasing a more fuel efficient vehicle is not in your near future, there are still many things you can do to prepare your vehicle for better fuel efficiency on a road trip.

First, make sure you get an appointment to get your vehicle tuned up before your trip, as a poorly tuned vehicle burns more fuel. This includes anything from improperly aligned or inflated tires, to a dirty filter or brake drag. Fixing a faulty oxygen sensor, for example, can improve mileage as much as 40 percent.

Another thing to remember is that the heavier the weight inside or attached to the vehicle, the harder it is on gas – just something to think about when packing for your trip. This includes towing trailers and having racks on top of the vehicle, which increases the aerodynamic drag (wind resistance) thus reducing fuel efficiency.

Generally fuel economy is maximized when accelerating and braking are minimal, so when you're on the road, try not to use quick accelerations or to break heavily, as this reduces fuel economy by as much as 33 per cent at highway speeds and 5 per cent around town. Driving at high speeds also increases aerodynamic drag, which reduces fuel economy. Increasing your cruising speed from 100 kilometres per hour to 120 km/h will drive up fuel consumption by about 20%. Reducing your speed from 100 km/h to 90 km/h improves fuel economy by about 10%. Also remember that using cruise control on the highway in free flowing traffic helps you maintain a constant speed and, in most cases, will reduce your fuel consumption.

Another thing to think about is non-electric games or activities to keep your kids busy, as sooner or later they will have to charge their electric devices (games and DVDs), so with your cell phones and their games and video equipment charging, along with the air conditioner on and the iPod plugged in can all decrease fuel efficiency dramatically. So take your kids to the library before the trip to pick out some good summer reading or get some books on CD for the car stereo.

You can also try to plan ahead to find the cheapest gas prices available where you are traveling. For instance, www.newbrunswickgasprices.com shows the cheapest gas prices in New Brunswick. And by typing in the postal code or zip code or clicking on the map of where you are going at www.gasbuddy.com, you can find the cheapest gas prices in the specific region of North America that you are in or are going to.

Often it is just a matter of simply changing some basic driving habits in order to improve your vehicle's fuel efficiency. And always remember what gets zero miles to the gallon – idling!

So when you're packing up the kids and the car this summer, keep in mind these simple tips and you'll be on your way to a more fuel-efficient summer vacation!

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