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Saving petrol, staying mobile – despite high fuel prices

Nine tips from the Federal Environment Agency

At the start of the summer fuel prices are reaching new record highs in Germany. The frustration felt by many people is understandable. There is no easing of fuel prices in sight, given the rising demand and scarce finite reserves of oil. “Simply complaining won’t help. Each and everyone of us can take real steps to control and reduce fuel consumption. “Ladylike” driving style can help: low revs, thinking ahead, and no quick starts. This will relieve the climate and the purse”, said the President of the Federal Environment Agency (UBA), Prof. Dr. Andreas Troge. A new UBA brochure offers practical advice on how anyone can save money and remain mobile despite higher prices.

The transport sector plays a large role in advancing the greenhouse effect. It accounts for 19 percent of total carbon dioxide emissions in Germany. This amounts to roughly 170 million tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO₂) per year, of which more than half is emitted by passenger vehicles. On the other hand the transport sector—unlike industry, trade and commerce, and private households—has done very little in the climate protect effort in Germany. Although a decline in fuel consumption in some car makes is noticeable, this success is partly offset by the trend towards larger and heavier cars as well as traffic volume growth. “Industry is building engines that are increasingly efficient; unfortunately, this progress is not sensed by the customer since many cars are becoming heavier and high-performance”, said Troge. UBA’s president commented, “Many car drivers complain about high petrol prices but criticism is muted even though it would be beneficial”. This year’s sales of diesel fuel in Germany over 2007 (for the Jan-May period) actually rose by nearly five percent, whereas petrol sales declined by 3.7 percent in the same period.

Effective climate protection can only be achieved with an overall cut in consumption; that is, through use of more efficient and smaller cars, making more frequent use of public passenger transport, cycling or walking. “Climate-friendly mobility is tantamount to cash savings. Anyone who commutes to work by bus or train spends an average of one third less than those driving private cars”, said Troge.

Proper energy-saving use of a car can do a lot for the environment, climate protection, and the household budget. However, efficient driving takes practice. Car drivers often know too little

about their vehicle's actual fuel economy and how much it depends on their driving behaviour. Troge said, "Many car drivers believe they are already driving optimally and are all the more surprised to discover this is not so after taking part in a training course of fuel-saving driving style." Here are nine golden rules for everyone who would like to save fuel now:

1. Drive at low revs, anticipate what's ahead and drive steadily: Avoid quick acceleration and sudden braking. In most cars it is no problem to shift into third gear when driving speed of 30 kilometres per hour (kph) is reached, into fourth at 40 kph, and into fifth at 50 kph and over—saving lots of fuel in so doing since you are driving at low revs. At speeds over 100 kph fuel, consumption spikes.
2. Use low viscosity oils and roll-on tyres: the former reduce engine drag, the latter reduce rolling resistance. Enquire at your garage or next time you stop at a petrol station.
3. Check tyre pressure regularly: pressure of 0.5 Bar lower than standard raises fuel consumption by about five percent.
4. Switch the engine off at stoplights or in traffic jams. An engine that idles for even 30 seconds produces more carbon dioxide than when it is restarted.
5. Resort to using air conditioning and rear window heating less frequently: in city traffic an air conditioning system can raise consumption by about 10-13 percent. This can mean up to two litres more per 100 km driven, even in an economy-size car. A heated rear window increases consumption by two to four seven percent. In summertime air out your car a few minutes before setting off—only then should the a/c system be switched on. Switch it off before arrival at destination to save fuel and prevent catching a cold.
6. Remove roof racks and other mounted objects when not in use. The heavier the car and higher the drag, the greater the fuel consumption.
7. Avoid cold starts for short trips, for a mid-sized car consumes an average 30 litres per 100 km directly after starting. Normal consumption is only achieved once the engine has reached operating temperature.
8. Look for economy models when purchasing a car. Ask manufacturers and dealers about fuel economy and get information from independent sources.
9. Ride a bicycle or walk when running short-distance errands. Choose cheaper and more ecological alternatives such as bus, rail, car sharing, and car pools for longer trips.

The German-language brochure *Sprit-Sparen und mobil sein* [Save fuel and stay mobile] is online at: http://www.umweltbundesamt.de/verkehr/mobil/downloads/sprit_sparen.pdf

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