Tips for saving on fuel

Whether you are just beginning college or are well on your road to a degree, the fall semester is about to begin for students. And many are forming a game plan on how to keep living costs at a minimal.

In small towns such as Atmore, Ala., students might opt to commute to area colleges instead of living in the dorms or renting a small apartment. This saves on a monthly rent expenditure but the amount you will spend in gas goes up, depending on how fuel efficient your vehicle is.

Staying close to home is beneficial because you already know where convenience stores and gas stations are located and which ones have the best competitive prices. One good way to make sure you get the lowest gas prices is to check Gas Buddy for your area.

So how do you offset gas costs? Here are a few simple reminders to saving at the pump:

- **Accelerate slowly.**

Are you a lead-footed driver who takes off fast? Tiny changes in how you drive can produce a large savings in fuel mileage and ultimately in how many times you buy gas. By moderately accelerating instead of going 0-60, you don't waste fuel that is burned off by the rapid speed. This is also true for getting onto interstates. Many people immediately try to get up to highway speed while still on the on ramp. Instead, you should reach highway speed at the spot where the on ramp meets the interstate. That's one reason why the lanes were designed to extend out for drivers to merge into oncoming traffic, because by that time you should be going the same speed, not faster or slower in order to merge.

- **Stop using your brakes so often.**

This is by far the most annoying habit people have while driving. Their foot must be glued to the brake or something. Braking is for coming to a complete stop. Coasting, however, is effectively used for slowing down but not intending to come to a full resting position, such as slowing down when you see the car in front of you put on a turn signal. The next time you are in slow-moving traffic that is not necessarily stop and go, try coasting and not braking when you see tail lights ahead of you. By taking your foot off the gas pedal and letting your car slow itself down, chances are you won't have to hit the brakes to avoid running into the person in front of you. Gravity will do its thing and you can continue on your way without ever applying the brakes. If you plan ahead and take your foot off the accelerator, you put less fuel into the car and won't have to exert more kinetic energy upon speeding back up.

- **Don't speed.**

Aside from not breaking the law, driving at a constant posted speed is the most fuel-efficient way to get better gas mileage. According to fueleconomy.gov, driving at a speed of 50 mph or less will result in less gas used over a period of time.

- **Don't load your car with excess weight.**

Avoid keeping unnecessary or daily items in your vehicle, especially heavy ones, such as a stack of beach chairs, golf clubs or sporting equipment. Sure, it can be convenient if you use such items daily, but until you are heading out to use them, don't haul them to the office or around town while you run errands. If you typically go for a round of golf after work, leave your clubs in your office or at your cubicle to avoid stopping at home to pick them up.

- **Use cruise control.**

This goes back to not speeding mentioned earlier, but by using cruise control you can maintain your speed without speeding up and slowing down at regular intervals, thus saving how much gas your car uses to keep you moving. Even using cruise control in neighborhoods helps ensure you don't accidentally go faster or slower than necessary.

- **Use proper tire inflation.**

Driving on under- or over-inflated tires not only is unsafe, but it also reduces gas mileage. According to the **U.S. Department of Energy,** every one psi drop in the pressure lowers gas mileage by **0.4** percent. On the flip side, over inflating your tires does not improve gas mileage but actually could do damage to your tires and cause them to blow out while driving.

You might not think that by cutting gas costs you are cutting college expenses. But even if you live near your campus, you probably will have to drive somewhere sometime, and over a few weeks or months' time, that savings can add up.