

Savin' Gas... Savin' \$\$\$

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These days, the price of gas goes up and down faster than the temperature outside! I'm not sure if I'll ever understand the correlation between the price of a barrel of oil and a gallon of gas. And why does diesel cost so much more, when it's refined less than gasoline? Remember that not too long ago, we used to joke that a gallon of gas was cheaper than bottled water? They're getting closer together as time goes by, and the water's not getting cheaper.

How many people have asked you what kind of mileage your Miata gets? Complete strangers ask or comment about it to me at least three times a week now. I just tell 'em that if gas was \$4 a gallon, I'd still be hard-pressed to spend \$50 filling it up. We're fortunate that our Miatas do pretty well in the fuel usage department. It seems that no matter how I drive it, I get about 30mpg. I know of others that get 33-35mpg in theirs. So what's the difference and how do we get that kind of mileage too?

So here are a few friendly reminders about how to save a little gas. You probably know many of these, but perhaps you'll find some new information you can use.

Vehicle - Drive the car that gets the best miles per gallon. Fortunately, that's the Miata in my household!

Tires - Keep your tires well inflated. The door sticker on the Miata recommends 26psi (in the NA & NBs anyway). You can easily run 35psi without issue, except for a little stiffer ride. Those extra psi help reduce the rolling resistance of the tire. It'll also give you some extra margin between properly inflated and under inflated if you don't check your tires often.

Tune-up - Keep the car tuned up! Now you have a chance to bond with your car... Change the air filter and spark plugs to help keep the engine running efficiently.

Idling - Don't idle anymore than you have to. Idling uses fuel without getting you anywhere. Shut the car off if you're going to be stopped for more than a traffic light. Heck, many of the hybrid cars today shut the engine off anytime the car is stopped for more than a few seconds. Stopped for a train? Shut it off.

Coasting - Coast... a lot. Look ahead, anticipate traffic conditions and coast whenever possible. You'd be surprised at how often you have the opportunity to coast but probably don't. You get forward motion, but the car is idling. Take your foot off the gas when you see a red light, coast onto an off-ramp, coast when traffic ahead slows down, etc.

Distances - leave more room between you and the car in front of you. Huh? More space means less slowing down. Less slowing down means you don't have to accelerate as often.

Short Shifting - Those of us with manual gearboxes can choose to shift at lower RPMs, say less than 4k RPMs. Getting into a higher gear sooner means less RPMs to use fuel. Some (including me) would argue that driving that way takes the fun out of the Miata. On the other hand, it's a different way of driving. Think of it as a challenge!

Acceleration - There are a couple of theories on this. Many say that you should simply accelerate as slowly as traffic conditions will allow. Others will point out that your engine is basically an air pump and is more efficient at large throttle openings. If you believe in the latter, then you accelerate quickly, but short-shift to keep the engine below 4k RPMs.

Aero - The Miata may be a swoopy little car, but it really isn't very aerodynamic. Having the top down makes it worse. *Warning: blasphemy ahead...* You can clean up the aerodynamics by

putting the top up, using a hardtop or limiting your top down driving to around town and lower speeds. Personally, I don't think any of THOSE strategies are worth it! :O)

Fuel – All years '90-'00 were designed to run on regular gas. There's no performance benefit to running higher octane in those engines, unless you've advanced the timing on your engine. If you have pinging under acceleration (sounds like stones rattling around in the engine), you need to run a higher octane fuel. Model years '01-present call for premium fuel, but can run on regular with reduced performance. Again, if you hear pinging, you need to go back to premium. If you're running a turbocharger or supercharger, don't even think about using regular, you need premium fuel.

Here's an NA/NB Miata-specific tip for you. Did you know that the Miata's ECU goes to full-rich at 4k RPMs? This means you're using more gas when cruising over 4k RPMs. In my 5-speed car, that equates to about 72 MPH or so. Staying below that uses less fuel. Sorry, I don't know if that applies to the NC models.

If you suddenly notice a marked decrease in fuel mileage, your oxygen sensor(s) may be suspect. In cars with two sensors, it's the one in front that sets the fuel trim. A bad sensor can make the car run rich, wasting fuel. Although it's not on the factory maintenance schedule, some mechanics recommend replacing the oxygen sensors every 100k. New generic sensors run about \$75. On the other hand, I'm on the originals at 142k miles. Great, now I've probably jinxed it...

If you'd like to know more about how to change your driving habits to use less fuel, get on the internet and do a search for "hypermiling", or check out www.hypermiling.com. Oh, and you could always slow down, walk, ride a bike or take public transportation.

So who wants to have a mileage contest? It'd be pretty easy to do. Everyone would fill up at the same gas station, letting the pump stop on its own. The group then drives the same route to some destination and back. On the return, everyone fills up again at the same pump they used before. You do the math and see who used the least amount of fuel. Anyone interested in an event like this? If you'd like to put something like this on, contact me and let me know!

The fine print: Your mileage may vary. Not responsible for accidents. Use at your own risk. Shown with optional equipment. Some equipment available at extra cost. Offer not valid in all states. See dealer for details. If you can find a better car, buy it.