

# Drivers slow down to ease fuel pain

Motorists are using every trick from slipstreaming to turning off lights and car sharing to fight rising prices, says **Jamie McGinnes**

MOTORISTS are turning to car sharing and go-slow driving as they struggle to cope with soaring fuel prices.

Although George Osborne, the chancellor, is expected to shelve a planned rise in fuel duty that would otherwise add 5p a litre at the pumps, that offers little respite to drivers.

Increasingly, motorists are resorting to "hypermiling" — driving in ways to extract maximum mileage out of a tank of fuel. Tactics include staying close to lorries to take advantage of their slipstream, keeping tyres pumped up to improve fuel efficiency and disconnecting internal lights and leaving headlights off until after dusk to conserve energy.

Average driving speeds have dropped across Britain, while sales of fuel-efficient diesel cars have reached a record high.

The use of car sharing has rocketed; membership of Liftshare, Britain's largest such group, has risen 65,000 in the past year to more than 420,000.

Figures from the Petrol-Prices.com comparison website showed the average price last Thursday for unleaded was 133.34p and 139.71p for diesel — compared with 90.6p and 99.8p during the same week in 2009. A mid-sized car typically does eight miles on a litre of petrol.

Edmund King, president of the AA, said rising fuel costs had led to more cars crawling along motorways at 50mph and free-wheeling down hills. Other drivers have turned to crime, with increases in garage "drive-offs" (leaving without paying) and the syphoning of

fuel from parked cars. Almost two-thirds of hauliers surveyed for a report being aired tonight by BBC Radio 5 Live said they had been victims of fuel theft in the past year and garages across London reported nearly 20,000 "drive-off" cases last year.

"We have drivers pulling fuses to switch off daylight running lights which automatically come on, waiting until it is pitch dark before switching on headlights and pumping up their tyres to gain a few more miles per gallon," said King.

A YouGov poll for The Sunday Times shows that nearly a third of people are driving more slowly because of petrol price increases. Almost one in five cancelled trips or holidays and four-fifths said Osborne should cancel the fuel duty hike.

Philip Hammond, the transport secretary, signalled his support for motorway speed limits to rise to 80mph in an interview with The Sunday Times last month. But Department for Transport figures show drivers are slowing down. Average motorway speeds for cars fell by 1mph between 2008 and 2009 and by 3mph for motorcycles between 2004 and 2009.

Spain has just lowered the national speed limit from 120km/h (74mph) to 110km/h (65mph) to save fuel.

There is evidence that British drivers are being priced

out of their cars. A steady rise in total traffic since 1974 slumped for the first time in 2008, when the economic downturn began, and has dropped each year since then, even though the country came out of recession at the end of 2009.

Karl Dyson, 30, from Stamford in Lincolnshire, set up hypermiler.co.uk, a website for motorists obsessed with fuel efficiency, and has seen visitor numbers soar in the past year.

Dyson, who runs his own IT business, tries to keep his Volvo estate at the optimum fuel-efficient speed of 56mph, pumps up his tyres each week and car shares with a colleague — all of which saves up to £60 a month.

Members of Liftshare.com, who typically save £800 a year, register for free and are put in touch with people in their area making similar journeys.

Katie Whitney, 28, from Liverpool, started sharing her journeys to work in Knutsford, Cheshire, with a colleague three months ago and says this should save £1,500 a year.

The Highways Agency traffic officer, who faces a 70-mile round trip six days a week, said: "Before I started car sharing, I was filling up every five days. This was neither environmentally nor economically friendly. Now it's every 14 days."

The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders revealed last week that diesel cars accounted for a record 46% of sales in 2010.

Some drivers are going further than merely buying diesel cars — by producing their own fuel. Revenue and Customs now allows anyone to "produce or use" up to 2,500 litres a year of biofuel or other fuel substitute duty free. The Gloucestershire-based Green Fuels sells devices for around £3,300 for converting waste oil into biodiesel and has just had record quarterly sales.

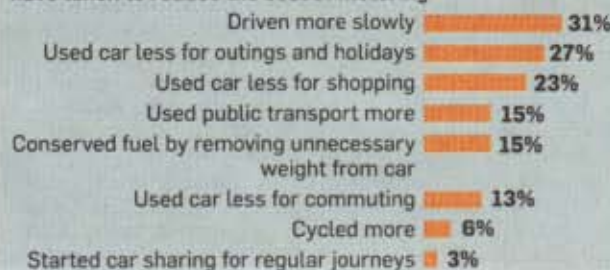


RICHARD STANTON

Katie Whitney saves £1,500 a year by car sharing

## Saving money

Car owners reveal the measures they have taken to reduce the cost of motoring



Source: YouGov poll of 2,682 adults last week



Knut, the polar bear, died in his enclosure yesterday. The bear was kept by his keeper, Thomas, after being rejected