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Best practice in fleet management
Issue 04

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In this Fleet Matters:

BEATING COSTS - 22 WAYS TO SAVE FUEL

Give the vehicle a chance

Think ahead

Drive greener

What help is available?

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Give the vehicle a chance

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There are only two ways to reduce fleet fuel costs. One is obvious, open to almost anyone, while the other requires knowledge and effort. The easy way to cut fuel bills is to pay significantly less for fuel in the first place, which means no more than having exactly the right fuel card. The more challenging route to lower bills is to use less fuel. That requires constant application of best practice by both fleet managers and their drivers, in three areas: vehicle care, journey preparation and eco-driving.

Vehicle care begins with having the right tool for the job, every time. Most obviously, never use a large vehicle if a smaller one will suffice, but do not assume that comparable vehicles have similar characteristics. As an example, there can be as much as 25% difference in mpg performance of **competing 1.6 litre diesel vans**.

Having chosen the right vehicle, use it to its full potential by treating it properly. As a matter of routine, only use top quality fuels and lubricants, which means any of the major oil company brands. While cheap brands may be based on the same basic petroleum products, they are unlikely to offer the same quality of engine-protecting additives. This applies as much to oil as to petrol and diesel. Other 'common sense' actions are all too easily overlooked or delayed:

- Have the vehicle serviced regularly, at no more than the manufacturer's recommended intervals.
- Pay special attention to spark plugs, which will each fire around 3,000 times during every mile on the road. Misfiring can increase fuel consumption significantly, while carbon tracking and compression leakage can quickly lead to expensive damage.
- Check air filters. Clogged filters may not themselves have a major fuel consumption impact, but they can affect acceleration performance, encouraging drivers to compensate with a heavier right foot.
- Have your oxygen sensor checked. **A faulty sensor** can easily lead to excessive fuel consumption.
- Confirm correct tyre pressures all around at least weekly. Under-inflation of just 15 psi can increase fuel consumption by **6%**.

Action point: Ensure that all drivers can only refuel with quality products and automate your service and maintenance scheduling. This should include even the most frequent and routine of tasks. Require each driver to confirm – by text or email – that tyre pressures are correct, for example. Underline the seriousness with disciplinary steps in cases of non-compliance.

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Think ahead

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Some fleet managers have their offices decorated with government posters from over 70 years ago, asking, “Is your journey really necessary?” It may seem excessive, but the point is valid. A good way to minimise fuel consumption is to drive as few miles as possible, making fewer and shorter journeys. Some of the responsibility for this will rest with the fleet manager, some with the driver.

- Find better routes. Many drivers always stick to familiar routes. It is easy to check whether a route is actually the most fuel-efficient, which does not necessarily mean the shortest.
- Make fewer trips and avoid shorter journeys. If a short trip is unavoidable, check whether it is really urgent. If not, combine a number of trips to the same or nearby destinations into one journey.
- Plan the timing of every trip, avoiding rush-hour and other periods likely to mean **congestion**. Sitting in traffic jams burns fuel and time unnecessarily.
- Avoid deviations. Know the route to be taken, check **online** for information on likely disruption and plan accordingly. Take into account any need to refuel and find the best forecourt along your planned route, using the **online service** or smartphone app provided by your fuel card supplier.
- Don’t get lost. If you do, stop as soon as possible and re-plan the route.
- Don’t carry unnecessary weight. Carrying unneeded items weighing just 2 kg in total for 100 miles each weekday is like giving away a free 25-mile, half-tonne delivery every three months.
- Don’t increase the drag on the vehicle. Unused roof-racks and open windows increase wind resistance and reduce fuel efficiency. If the windows do not need to be open, keep them closed.
- Remember that there is no such thing as free electricity. Any electrical item in use has an impact, however small, on fuel efficiency. Air conditioning, in particular, is a significant drain on power. It has long been known that, at anything other than a constant motorway speed, using air conditioning can reduce miles per gallon by between **5% and 10%**.

Action point: Educate your drivers to understand the need for efficient journey planning. Make it easy for them to contribute to fuel efficiency by providing satellite navigation equipment and app-equipped smartphones for efficient refuelling. Avoid taking for granted any route, always checking there is no better alternative.

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Drive greener

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Some fuel efficiencies lay beyond the immediate control of the fleet manager, being the direct responsibility of the driver. Fuel consumption can be improved significantly, vehicle by vehicle and across any type of fleet, through commitment to eco-driving practices.

- Start and go. Do not turn on the engine until you are ready to leave, then set off immediately. There is no need to ‘warm up’ a modern engine, even in cold weather, it only takes a few seconds for oil to be circulating properly.
- Don’t rev the engine. It achieves nothing useful and increases engine wear.
- Change up through the gears as soon as is reasonable, to the highest gear for the conditions
- Don’t burn fuel at traffic lights, or anywhere else. If it is likely that the vehicle will be stationary for more than a minute, turn off the engine.
- Read the road ahead. Anticipate the need to slow down or stop and do it by easing off the accelerator, rather than braking.
- Drive as smoothly as possible, changing lanes as necessary if it will allow a constant speed.
- If the vehicle is fitted with a cruise control, use it. Set it to the minimum speed that will avoid inconvenience to other road users while still getting you there in time.
- Reduce speed slightly when going uphill, rather than piling on the revs, and make up the few seconds lost by cruising down the other side.
- Stick to the speed limit. A journey of 25 miles at 70 mph takes 21.4 minutes; at 80 mph, it takes 18.8 minutes. A saving of under three minutes is not worth the extra cost of the fuel and the risk of a **fine**.

Action point: Encourage responsible driving throughout the fleet, emphasising the environmental benefits as much as the reduction in fuel costs.

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What help is available?

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Fuel Card Services has many years' experience in helping with cost-effective fleet management, gaining an invaluable depth and breadth of expertise. Its experience is readily available to fleet managers through a widening range of specialist services and products.

Many thousands of fleets nationwide, of all sizes and types, already refuel using commercial fuel cards from Fuel Card Services. The immediate cost benefits include fixed weekly pricing that typically delivers savings of up to 4p per litre on national average pump prices and up to 10p per litre on motorway refuelling. Additional major savings are achieved through virtually eliminated paperwork, minimised administrative workload and fast, trouble-free delivery of custom management information.

Other services include emissions recording, mileage capture solutions and automation of fleet management tasks, from service scheduling to licence checking.

Action point: Contact Fuel Card Services and ask for an illustration of how much money and time you could save, with solutions that exactly meet your specific refuelling and fleet management requirements.

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