

# Driving Differently is a Gas

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Over the 4th of July weekend, our family went up to my wife's parents' cottage for a relaxing holiday. Like oodles of Americans, we drove to our destination – a depressing proposition given the high price of gas.

To combat soaring fuel costs, an old gas-saving phenomenon is suddenly sweeping the nation. Known as “hypermiling”, fuel efficiency is maximized by incorporating a series of driving techniques, such as eliminating hard acceleration, turning off the engine at stop lights and coasting to a stop.

The practice allegedly began during the gas-rationing days of World War II and returned during the oil embargo of the 1970s. Some of the driving habits are simple and practical. To increase miles-per-gallon, drivers should keep heavy junk out of the trunk to keep the vehicle lighter and minimize the use of air conditioning, which can cut mileage by 5 to 25%. Another move is inflating your tires to their maximum capacity, even above the recommended pressure.

Some of the techniques, however, are a little more advanced. One popular tactic is driving as if you have no brakes. Drivers save gas by gliding to stops instead of accelerating to them and using momentum to sling-shot a vehicle through turns instead of braking first, then accelerating.

A few of the most aggressive maneuvers, however, are potentially dangerous and oftentimes illegal. Shifting the car into neutral while going downhill may save fuel, but can be problematic if the driver unexpectedly needs to accelerate. Turning the engine off altogether while coasting is very dangerous. Power steering and power brakes obviously don't work with the engine off, which can lead to many accidents.

“Drafting” is a popular strategy employed by NASCAR drivers and involves tailgating other racecars to reduce wind resistance and to be pulled by the lead car's wake. The same ploy works on the highway, where hypermilers follow semi-trucks because of their big girth. The problem is, many truck drivers can't see their followers, especially if the car is a fuel-efficient compact tucked right behind them.

So, we should all be wary of high gas prices, but at the same time drive safely for ourselves and our fellow travelers.