

Driving Sustainably to save fuel, reduce stress, increase safety and save wear and tear on your vehicle.
By Lawrence Israel 7-24-2015

Driving a vehicle can be expensive, stressful, dangerous, competitive or not depending on how you decide to operate your vehicle.

I see all sorts of driving styles ranging from distracted, oblivious, cautious, aggressive, defensive and all out reckless. Driving can be a cruise or a stressful unpleasant task depending on how you drive. I think that most of us want to arrive at our destination unscathed, on time and happy without causing harm or bad feelings to others or ourselves.

Driving sustainably is a technique that can save fuel, reduce stress, increase safety, keep your driving record clean, insurance costs low, and reduce wear and tear on your ride. If you drive a large fuel consumptive vehicle or a small fuel efficient vehicle a benefit from driving sustainably will be realized either way.

Following distance between your ride and the vehicle in front of you can save or end your life. Leaving a cushion of time and space between your vehicle and the vehicle in front of you; not tailgating can make a huge difference. Someone will always want to pass and overtake you no matter how fast or slow you are moving down the road. Don't get between a fool and a cop. Allow the fool to have the unwanted interaction with Law Enforcement or another vehicle. Save yourself from this undesirable experience. My dad was a fast aggressive driver. He loved speed and high G turns. He used to tailgate, pass in sketchy situations, brake hard, and accelerate hard while scaring the heck out of passengers and other drivers. He was killed along with two others in a head on collision while following another vehicle on hwy 89 in Arizona between Ash Fork and Chino Valley. The vehicle he was following swerved off the road ahead of him to reveal another vehicle on the wrong side of the road heading right at him. He did not have enough time to react and get out of the way. If he was following the vehicle ahead of him at a greater distance he might have had enough time to get out of the way and may have lived to know his grandchildren. Instead there was a life ending collision for him and a husband and wife returning home from a Christmas party back in December of 1998. The road conditions were good, and my dad's car was fresh out of the shop for maintenance. The collision occurred at around 7AM. The other driver was at fault but that made no difference in the outcome. I will never forget the look of grief on my step-mom's face from losing the love of her life when I saw her after the collision. Losing my dad this way was a life changing experience for me. I no longer drive aggressively. I keep a picture of my dad on the visor of my truck to remind me to stay safe. My driving record is clean and I have not been in a serious collision in many years. I used to drive just like my dad before he was killed but that changed very quickly after his death. Please take some good advice from this story rather than from your personal experience.

Tread lightly on the gas pedal. Increasing speed rapidly uses more fuel than a slow steady increase in speed. The time you save by gunning the motor is insignificant on most trips. Stop and go driving uses more fuel, more brake pads and reduces the life of your tires and vehicle, than driving at a steady even speed. Avoid stopping and starting quickly by buying time between red and yellow lights. This is done by looking ahead down the road at what the other cars and what the next traffic light is doing. If you see a yellow or red traffic light and a sea of brake lights ahead, take your foot off of the gas and coast. Gradually slow down to a crawl until the conditions change. Let the more aggressive drivers overtake and pass your vehicle while watching them waste fuel and brakes by racing to the next red light and slamming on the brakes while you relax, save money and enjoy a smooth steady ride. The time you lose by doing this is almost imperceptible because you and the driver who races to the next red light will not pass that red light ahead any sooner. If this is done properly you can buy enough time so the light is green and the vehicles ahead of you are moving and not blocking your progress down the road. No hard

braking or rapid acceleration is necessary and a smooth comfortable, low stress ride is achieved.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newton's_laws_of_motion An object in motion stays in motion. This is the crux of driving sustainably.

Time is money. Allow enough time so you are not rushed and stressed out while behind the wheel. Planning your schedule to give enough time to navigate the mess on the roads is a key element to driving sustainably. Traffic, red lights, accidents, road maintenance and cops are part of the deal so deal with it by adjusting to the conditions. Haste makes waste. Sitting in a car not going anywhere with the motor running is also a waste. Any vehicle with fuel injection can be shut down and started again during idle periods because doing this does not use extra fuel. The idle times can include waiting in a traffic jam, or waiting in line at a drive thru business. I really don't want to get into DWI aspects of sustainability because we have all been at one time or the other reminded of how this activity plays out. There it is...done.

Take pride in your ride. My ride is old. It is a 2001 Ford Ranger pickup truck with over 203,500 original miles on it. My truck still looks and runs great because of the way I drive and care for the vehicle. I drive defensively and I don't speed. I have a great mechanic who keeps it running right. All this adds up to a huge savings which benefits me and my family. My comprehensive auto insurance policy is dirt cheap. The fuel efficiency is ok, and the upkeep costs on the vehicle are minimal.

Correct tire air pressure is important. Your tires are where the rubber meets the road. Over inflated and under inflated tires wear out prematurely. Under inflated tires cause excessive rolling resistance and use more fuel. Over inflated tires don't provide good traction. Worn tires don't perform well especially in wet conditions because of hydroplaning. Hydroplaning is a condition where there is a thin layer of water between your tires and the road which will allow you to slide on turns and while trying to stop quickly. More speed increases the likelihood of hydroplaning with wet road conditions because there is less time for the tire to squish the water out of the way to allow the tire to make good contact with the road. Your vehicle's engine will run more efficiently and last longer with a clean air filter, fuel filter, lubricants, fluids and regular maintenance so spend the time and money to maintain your investment. Being able to stop quickly when necessary is important so have your brakes checked and serviced regularly. The alternative is spending more money in the long run. If you change out the brake pads before you hear the awful grinding squealing noise of metal on metal you will not have to spend more money on brake rotor replacement. Hard braking will cause excessive heat on the brake system which will in turn cause the brake rotors to warp and wear out prematurely. If you have ever felt the brake pedal vibrating or pulsating when you step on it is probably a warped brake rotor. This creates uneven pressure which leads to other problems related to premature wear on the entire suspension system on your ride along with decreased ability to stop quickly when necessary. Smooth steady braking is the way to go because it allows other drivers behind you enough time to react and avoid a rear-end collision and creates less wear and tear on your ride.

Communication between drivers is necessary to avoid problems. Head lights, brake lights, turn signals and the occasional friendly wave or a short toot on the horn do a great job of communicating your location and intentions to other drivers. Regularly check the functionality of all the exterior lights on your vehicle and use your turn signals before you change lanes or make right or left turns at intersections. If you don't have a ride with daytime driving lights consider getting a daytime driving light module installed that operates the headlights at 80% when the car is running. They are very inexpensive compared to the cost of a collision. Oh the joy of being unexpectedly cut off by a driver who suddenly decides to brake and turn without using their turn signals. Slamming on the brakes and praying usually works but not always.

Is there junk in the trunk? If you want to get better gas mileage remove everything from your vehicle that is not being used with the exception of the bare essentials. The junk in your trunk is costing you a pretty penny. My work requires that I carry a bunch of tools and equipment to job sites. When I am not working tools get removed from the truck and put into a secure storage shed until I need it again. I save a bunch of money this way. It takes me about 20 min. to unload and about 15 min. to load up for work. Doing this is extra time well spent with a quick exercise session too. A heavier vehicle is always more expensive than a light ride, and a light weight ride handles better.

Be cool. Your attitude and mind set will govern your choices while driving. Stress and lack of sleep are the norm these days. Take into account the way you feel when you get behind the wheel. Cut folks and yourself some extra slack if you are not at the top of your game. If you are happy, relaxed, and well rested you will be more likely to make good choices. If you are stressed, angry, tired, and late this will also be reflected in the choices you make while driving. You can only control the way you drive. If other drivers are making bad choices you still have the ability to adjust the way you drive to the current conditions on the road to keep yourself safe. Reacting aggressively to drivers making bad choices will only increase stress and decrease the level of safety for everyone on the road.

Driving sustainably is a reasonable smart choice to make because doing so creates a win win situation for everyone on the road. Safety, fuel consumption and how long your ride lasts and the amount of money you spend to keep your vehicle on the road are all affected by the choices we make while driving. I hope this posting has raised awareness and presented a reasonable alternative to the craziness on the roads. Good luck, stay safe and drive happy.