



10 ways to save fuel

Yes, they are mostly obvious, but do you use them?

I am slowly getting used to paying \$20 or more when I fill my bike's tank. No, that's not true. I am not getting used to it. I am getting to hate it more and more every time it happens. And heaven help the pump jockey who comes the uncooked crustacean with me about taking my helmet off when he's extracting — extorting! — more than a buck-and-half for each litre of fuel from me.

Not amused. Not happy. Time to get sensible and look at ways of saving fuel — even on a bike. Here are some ways of doing just that, arranged in no particular order. And yes, I know that many of them are obvious — but I'm prepared to bet that you (like me) have been ignoring them anyway, because after all, bikes use so little petrol, don't they?

Well, these days even that "little petrol" costs a lot of money, so it's time to get nitpicky. Here are my top 10 ways; if you have any others I'd be very happy to hear of them.

1. Tune the beast, and by that I don't just mean getting the carburetion right (although that helps). If you have fuel injection, make sure the jets are clear. It's amazing how much crap fuel there is out there and even partially blocked jets lead to excessive usage. So does a badly set carburettor.
2. Check your choke. It can easily happen that wear, accumulated grease or simply stretched cables are affecting the way the choke opens and shuts. Even a slight "leak" here can cost fuel and affect spark plugs.
3. Clean or replace the air filter. If the engine doesn't have equal access to fuel and air it will start drinking more heavily (I'm the same, actually). This is pretty easy to sort and should be something you do regularly, anyway. Dirtbike owners tend to be better at this than roadbike people, for obvious reasons.
4. Get your tyre pressure right. Properly inflated tyres give you safe handling without wasting fuel. How many of us

run around on under-inflated tyres just because we can't be bothered checking them? Lots, including me. Till now! Bike and tyre manufacturers often recommend a range. If you're going to do a lot of freeway kilometres you might think about taking the pressure to the upper limit of what's recommended. If you're going to hit the back roads and need good handling, it's better to not go too high with the pressure.

5. Go forth smoothly. Remember the big scare about the way luggage racks increase fuel usage in cars? Well, if you have (unnecessary) pannier sticking out the side of the bike, especially soft ones, or if you wear flubby jackets or subject your bike to any number of other non-smooth looks, you're slave to the same effect. Trucks save enormous amounts of fuel by just fitting a fuel scoop and tidying up the covers over their loads.

6. Change up early. Stay in the bike's effective rev range, but resist the temptation to rev out before each gear change. If you make a habit out of changing early, you will reap the benefit of improved mileage; I know, I've worked on this one and it's quite noticeable. Don't rev the engine out unless it's really necessary. Don't lug it, either.

7. Look after lubrication. If things are turning smoothly inside the engine and gearbox, it takes less fuel to spur them on. Make sure you're using the correct lubricants and change them regularly — at least as often as your manual requires, ideally even more frequently.

8. Check the chain. A staggering amount of power is robbed by a poorly adjusted chain and that power needs to be made up by burning extra fuel. So adjust the chain properly and while you're doing that make sure that nothing else, such as brake pads, is dragging either.

9. Think "economy", not all the time, obviously. You don't want to lose the fun of riding because of some humourless

concentration on squeezing the last bit of power out of every drop — but keep it in mind. A friend of mine wins economy runs on his — wait for it — Harley Sportster and one of his tricks is to ride on the white line at the edge of the road. Less rolling resistance, you see. No, I don't recommend you do this in normal riding, but it's just one of the things to keep in mind.

10. A warm engine is a happy engine. If you are going to work the bike hard, make sure it's fully warmed up before you do. All the various bits and pieces will be slipping past each other in a nice, warm film of oil and resistance will be minimised. And — just for you — here's a bonus suggestion!

11. Buy a scooter as well as your bike. If you do a lot of short trips or perhaps commute in heavy traffic, you may well find that buying a frugal scooter and using it instead of the big bike can save you money. It saves wear on expensive items such as tyres, too. Scooter tyres are cheap, as are oil and air filters and many other consumables.

Wondering why I haven't recommended any of the alleged fuel-saving pills or doodads? It's because I don't believe they work. Mind you, John is trialling an additive at the moment in the long-term Kawasaki Versys and we shall see what happens there.

Likewise, such tried and "true" panaceas as water injection come up for discussion every now and then. My understanding is that water injection does work, but only in a very limited type of engine. If I were to assure you that the only bike in which any of us have ever seen an improvement in fuel consumption with water injection was a 650 Ural, would that tell you something?

I reckon I can get up to 20 per cent better fuel economy if I follow all of my own suggestions and keep up my vigilance. Why don't you try it and let us know what kinds of savings you can get?

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WORDS: LEANNE MCMARTIN