Simple steps to maximize fuel efficiency

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

With the summer driving season ahead and gas prices nearing $3 per gallon, motorists can take a few simple steps to maximize their vehicle's fuel efficiency.

"Everyone wants to stretch fuel dollars as far as possible," said AAA Oregon/Idaho Approved Auto Repair Manager Earl Baker, "but are they taking steps to do that? The AAA Gas Watcher's Guide brochure, available at most of our service centers, can help consumers cut gasoline costs, whether they're driving a car, truck or SUV."

Following are some simple tips to keep in mind:

Drive more efficiently: stay within posted speed limits; stop aggressive driving; and avoid unnecessary idling. (Fuel efficiency at speeds in excess of 60 mph decreases significantly. City gas mileage can be increased by as much as 5% if motorists avoid sudden stops and starts.) Combine errands; use cruise controls when appropriate; use the air conditioning conservatively; remove excess weight from the trunk (an extra 100 pounds can reduce a typical carâ€™s fuel economy by up to two percent) and avoid packing items on top of the car (wind resistance caused by roof rack or carrier can cut fuel economy by as much as five percent).

Properly maintain the vehicle: check spark plugs; check oil and air filters (clogged filters can reduce efficiency by as much as ten percent); and inflate tires according to manufacturer's recommendation (under-inflation is a safety hazard and can cut fuel economy by as much as 2 percent for each pound of pressure below the recommended level).

Use the recommended fuel: most cars require regular octaneâ€”using a higher-octane offers no benefit. Keep your fuel tank at least a quarter full at all times. If your fuel level drops below that, sediment, water or other debris that collects in the bottom of the gas tank could be fed into the fuel system, causing damage that could cost anywhere from several hundred to more than a thousand dollars to repair.

Motorists should also beware of so-called "gas savers." Be skepticalâ€”check out the claims. Some of the gas savers might actually cost more than any fuel cost savings derived, and they may damage the engine or increase exhaust emissions.