

Reduce Your Driving Costs

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The way you drive can affect your income. Couriers were renowned for using excessive speed, the attitude being, the sooner I get this job done- the sooner I can start on the next. Unfortunately in this day and age, this reasoning doesn't stand up to scrutiny. For a start off you may not have another job to go to, and taking on too much work can result in excessive driving hours, something the new C.P.C. has been brought in to combat.

But let's talk about saving money first. The government have been pushing manufactures to produce vehicles which are less harmful to the environment, and do more miles to the gallon/litre. Manufacturers have tackled this on several fronts, firstly vans are now more aerodynamic increasing efficiency, secondly by reducing weight, and thirdly most, if not all, new vans now have six gears.

The weight reductions mostly in the engines increases efficiency, in the short term at a future cost.

What influences your driving costs, is the way you drive. If the vehicle you are driving is fitted with a rev counter, you will be able to control your costs much easier. For instance you can see the dramatic difference in speed between fifth gear and sixth at a specific revolution. At 2000 revs per minute in fifth gear, you can expect your vehicle to travel at around 45 m.p.h. in sixth gear you can expect to be doing 60 m.p.h. using only 2000 revs. The lesson being that the sooner you get into your highest gear, the cheaper your journey will be. When to change gear comes with experience, you should be able to tell at what speed you should change up or down a gear from the noise of your engine. A lot of speedo's have markings on showing a gear figure against a particular speed [also some rev counters have the same markings]. These are not the recommended speeds at which you should change gear, they are the maximum speed or revs for that gear recommended for your engine.

Couriers had a reputation for driving fast and stopping fast, fortunately this type of driver is slowly learning the true cost of their actions on their profit margins. The cost of fuel is approximately 35% of your cost for a journey.[you will charge your customer one way, you will pay for fuel on the outward bound and homeward bound

journey]. Any thing you can do to reduce this cost, puts more money in your pocket. I have dealt with driving defensively before in the article [Save money- Save the Planet](#) One tip which will save you money is, as you pull off the motorway, once your van is clear of the motorway take your foot of the accelerator pedal. A diesel engine is a high compression engine which will slow you down. If the exit from the motorway is an uphill gradient, with a little bit of practice you will still be in top gear when you reach the roundabout at the top of the slip road, and travelling about 15 m.p.h. This gives you enough time to select the correct gear to negotiate the roundabout safely with out having to set off in first gear. Again you should be able to tell from the sound of your engine, how slow you can go before selecting another gear. A juddering noise from under the van usually means you have left it in too high a gear for too long.

Unfortunately now, engines are not designed to last very long, most will last 2 to 300,000 miles before major work is required. The manufacturers in their quest to reduce weight and increase fuel consumption have unwittingly weakened some parts in the engine. The cam shaft and cams were cast in one solid piece of metal, and then machined to the fine tolerances needed. In modern engines this has been replaced by a tube with the cams sweated on, in order to save weight. The con rods which move the pistons up and down were again made from a solid casting. These have been lightened by having holes or slots machined in them. Combine this with the trend of fitting more powerful turbos, produces faster more economical engines, at the cost of a shorter working life. **To increase engine life it is now more important than before to warm your engine up before setting off.**

Set Yourself a Routine

BEFORE YOU SET OFF each day the first thing you should do is lift the bonnet and check your levels. All vehicles are fitted with a plastic type header water tank marked with maximum and minimum levels for the water in your engine, you can check the level without removing the cap. The oil level should always be checked when the engine is cold, and before you start it up. If the engine has been run, even for a few minutes, you will get a false oil level reading. Always check oil levels when the vehicle is parked on a flat level surface. If the engine is in good condition, you would not expect to top up either the water or oil between services. You can also check the oil levels in the brakes and clutch by checking the minimum and maximum marks on the outside of the reservoir. Power steering oil usually requires you to remove the cap to check level on a weekly basis. Invariable the washer bottle will require topping up. Always use a proprietary screen wash, as this will help stop the water from freezing. If you are running a sprinter with the rubber washer pipe running up the side of the wiper arm, these tend to freeze up quite easily. One solution is to add a table spoon full of Metholated Spirit to the water; this will help stop them from freezing.

The next thing you should always do, before you start the engine is, release the

hand brake, engage first or reverse if there is the possibility the vehicle will move. Press the foot brake and hold it down. The foot brake should only travel about 2 centimetres, any more than this indicates that your brakes are wearing and require adjusting or replacing. Keep your foot on the brake and start the engine. As the engine fires the brake pedal should go down a further 2 or 3 centimetres, this indicates that your servo is working correctly, at the same time you should check your A.B.S. light, this should go out after about 4 seconds indicating your A.B.S. is working correctly.[Check with the drivers handbook for the exact time] Put the handbrake on and check the lights. If you can't see if your brake lights are working or not, put a house brick on the pedal then walk round the back of the vehicle to check the lights. Tyre pressures need checking on a weekly basis.

The engine will have been running for 2 or 3 minutes now, I then spend a few minutes setting up the sat nav, and checking that my phone has connected to the blue tooth hands free. In winter the time taken to de-ice windscreen and mirrors, is usually sufficient to warm up the engine. I tend to drive under the speed limit and at low revs until the water temperature reaches normal. This routine can add 25% extra to the life of your engine. Driving at the legal speed limit continuously over a long distance on a warm engine will not cause damage to the engine.

[This is 5 or 6 minutes well spent, and if you are really pushed for time, here are a couple of tips to make up the time you have used warming up your engine.](#)

Firstly if you are driving between midnight and 6-0 a.m. you will have noticed that every set of traffic lights are on red on the major roads and green on the minor roads. This is to slow traffic down. The next time you are out on the road at this time of day, when you are about 200 yards away from the traffic lights, flash your headlights once; this is enough to trigger the lights to change. If you are travelling at 30 m.p.h the lights should change before you have to change out of top gear. This saves you time, money and wear and tear on the engine, gearbox, and clutch. This does not work on all sets of traffic lights.

Secondly, how many times have been stuck in traffic in the nearside lane on a dual carriageway with a roundabout at the end of it? You see lots of drivers flying passed hoping to push in at the front of the queue. Try this little trick it can save you a bit of time. Drive up the outside lane to the roundabout, and then go round the roundabout where you have right of way to go down the road you want to. You can overtake a hundred or so cars safely and at low speed.

Bio Fuels

The amount of Bio Fuel added to petrol and diesel at the pump, is to increase to 5% in 2010. Some hauliers and couriers are increasing this to 15%, 30% or even 100%, to reduce costs and emissions. However before going down this road, check with your engine manufacturer, to see if your vehicle will run on the percentage of bio fuels you propose using. Failing to check first could be more costly in repairs, than any saving you may make.

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