

drive down emissions

We know cars harm the environment but until there's a viable alternative, how can we minimise the damage?

While most of us set aside the newspapers for recycling, and remember to switch the TV off at the socket and not leave it on standby, we rarely think twice about jumping in the car to drive to work or pick up the shopping. Yet driving a car is one of the most environmentally destructive things we can do. 'A typical car produces its own weight in CO₂ emissions for every 6,000 miles driven. With more than 30 million cars on our roads, traffic has become the third largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in the UK,' says at home's eco consultant, Rob Holdway.

Ways round it

Most eco campaigners would say that you can't be green and own a car. But while modern lifestyles and deficiencies in the public transport system mean there's often no viable alternative, we can minimise the harm we're doing by driving.

Firstly, cut down on unnecessary journeys. If walking, cycling or public transport is an option, take it. Joining a car-sharing scheme can also make a difference: the average car commuter drives 12 miles a day and could save 400kg of CO₂ over one year (or 170 litres of petrol) by sharing a lift with a colleague. To find a scheme near you, see www.carplus.org.uk. Car hire clubs can change the way we use vehicles. City Car Club

THE GREEN CAR OF THE YEAR AWARD 08 WENT TO THE FORD FOCUS 1.6 TDCI ECONETIC. ACCORDING TO WHAT-GREENCAR? IT HAD THE LOWEST CO₂ EMISSIONS

(www.citycarclub.co.uk) leases cars when members need one and claims participants increase their use of other transport modes by 40% after joining a club, cutting car use by 15%.

Small is beautiful

The car you choose can greatly affect your carbon footprint. Generally, the larger the car and the higher power its engine, the more CO₂ emissions it will produce. So, while so-called 'Chelsea tractors' have well-earned reputations as gas guzzlers, high-powered sports cars can out-do them on the environmental disaster stakes. If you don't need a six-seater family car, a huge boot or Concorde-level acceleration, opt for a smaller vehicle.

New cars should display their fuel-efficiency rating. Depending on carbon emissions, cars are categorised into seven bands, from A to G, with bands A and B emitting the least CO₂. These bands determine the amount of Vehicle Tax you'll have to pay – another good reason for choosing a lower emission band car. For a detailed comparison of fuel efficiency of different models, look at www.vcacarfueldata.org.uk

Fill her up

Diesel has been promoted as a greener choice than petrol because it produces less CO₂. However, diesel cars generally release more nitrogen

oxides, associated with poor local air quality. There are now a variety of greener fuel options to consider if buying a new car. Biofuels are frequently touted as the future of green driving, and Richard Drew, south west manager of City Car Club, would recommend this form of vehicle for eco-conscious drivers. 'For ease of use and cost benefits, biodiesel is the best bet. It's also the most economic and releases fewer CO₂ emissions. At the moment it's not easy to get hold of but, apart from refuelling, there's no difference to driving an ordinary car.'

A cheaper and more eco-friendly fuel is liquefied petroleum gas (LPG). It produces fewer CO₂ emissions and air pollutants than petrol or diesel, but isn't readily available in the UK. Richard Drew suggests it's no longer the top choice. 'We did run a lot of LPGs a couple of years ago – they were the best option for lower emissions and let us save on fuel costs,' he says. 'But LPG is difficult to source and because of that, it's the least effective option.'

Electric cars don't use traditional fuel, so produce no pollution. They are driven by a battery-powered electric motor, although the six-hour recharge required will negate most environmental benefits if you use electricity from non-renewable sources. The range and speed of

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REDUCING CARBON OUTPUT

The government claims that following these easy-to-practice tips could cut your fuel consumption by a month's worth per year. They will also help to reduce CO₂ emissions by 8%, too...

CLEAN OUT Clutter in your boot is extra weight that your engine will need to burn more fuel to carry around.

WATCH YOUR SPEED At 70mph you could be using up to 9% more fuel than at 60mph, and up to 15% more fuel than at 50mph.

KEEP OFF THE BRAKE Save fuel by decelerating early into red lights rather than keeping your foot on the gas and then braking.

NO NEED TO REV Over-revving wastes fuel and increases engine wear, so change up a gear a little

earlier. If you drive a diesel car, try changing up a gear when the rev counter reaches 2,000rpm. For a petrol car, change up at 2,500rpm.

PUMP UP Check your tyre pressures: under-inflated tyres create more resistance so your engine has to work harder, using more fuel and producing more CO₂ emissions.

SWITCH OFF When the engine is idling you're adding to CO₂ emissions. If you're likely to be at a standstill for more than three minutes, simply switch off the engine.

vehicles such as the G-Wiz mean it will be of use mainly for short urban journeys, which is a distinct disadvantage for Rob Holdway: 'With a maximum speed of 40mph and capable of just 40 miles between charges, the only race you're likely to win is towards saving our planet.'

The most popular choice now are hybrid cars such as the Toyota Prius or Honda Civic Hybrid. These use both a petrol or diesel engine and an electric motor in an effort to reduce the amount of fossil fuel used. 'They're no different to driving a petrol car, but because only versions with automatic gearboxes are available, they're a turn-off for some, and the running costs are generally more expensive,' suggests Richard.

Stick with it

If you've been tempted by the new breed of eco vehicle, experts suggest the most environmentally friendly option is to stick with the car you've got. Around 80% of the energy a car uses is burned in making it run, but a hefty 15% is required to develop, design and manufacture it. Rob Holdway recommends choosing second-hand to buying a trendy eco-model: 'The 15 tonnes of waste produced in making a car mean you should hold onto it for a while to mitigate effects of its creation.'

Rob says...

'Ideally we should reduce the number of cars clogging up our motorways by reducing the amount we drive and opting for public transport instead. With prices at the pumps soaring (the average car currently costs around £2,300 a year to run and is expected to rise to £3,600 each year), car sharing is a great way to lower emissions and your fuel costs.'