

Tips for eco-safe driving

Minimising vehicle use is the best way to save fuel and improve road safety but, for the times when a journey is the only option, the Driving Standards Agency trials of eco-safe driving showed that savings of between 5% and 17% (average 8.5%) in fuel used are possible for drivers ranging from novice to expert.

Interactive Driving Systems has summarised a review of work by the United Nations Environment Programme, the German Road Safety Council, UK fuel guru Dr Michael Coyle, the UK Driving Standards Agency and the UK Sustainable Development Commission, who have provided the following 15 eco-safe tips for drivers:

- Read the vehicle handbook to ensure that you know how it works, and that it is maintained in line with manufacturer recommendations.
- Remove unnecessary load weight and roof racks.
- Circle-check the vehicle before each journey. Look for fluids on the floor, poorly-inflated tyres or anything out of the ordinary. FLOWER is a good circle-check acronym – fuel, lights, oil, water, electrics and rubber.
- Avoid reversing with a cold engine. Reverse into parking spaces when the engine is warm. It is also safer to reverse in and drive out. Warm the engine by pulling away smoothly and driving gently.
- Plan and look ahead to anticipate road and traffic conditions, when to slow down or stop well in advance. Early recognition of potential hazards optimises speed, minimises harsh braking or acceleration and avoids unnecessary stopping. A smoother drive, acting in good time rather than reacting at the last moment, also reduces stress and helps traffic flow.
- Drive calmly. If you are angry or upset you are more likely to drive aggressively, accelerate harshly, brake heavily and make risky manoeuvres = worse fuel consumption, increased vehicle wear and tear and likelihood of collisions.
- Choose the right speed – always observe the speed limit to stay legal, save fuel, be safe, and get there just as quickly.
- Use engine braking. When you take your foot off the accelerator, the engine acts as a compression brake. Leave plenty of space and observe what the traffic is doing to use engine braking effectively.
- Use the vehicle's momentum. When you go over the crest of a hill if it is safe to do so, take your foot off the accelerator pedal and let the vehicle's own momentum propel the vehicle forward.
- Use block gear changing in manual vehicles. It is not always necessary to use every gear in the gearbox in sequence. If you understand your vehicle, the road and traffic conditions this skip changing can help save fuel and your gearbox.
- Gear high and rev low. Without making the engine struggle, and as soon as conditions allow, use the highest possible gear for the road speed.
- Air conditioning should not be used unless absolutely necessary.
- Keep the vehicle moving – avoid stopping and starting by looking and planning ahead. If it's fitted, cruise control can help on longer journeys.
- Engine idling wastes fuel and causes long-term damage to the engine. If you are likely to not move for more than 30 seconds, switch the engine off.
- Monitor your fuel consumption continuously and measure improvements.