



GET PRACTICAL...

with Deputy Editor Rachel Stothert



A leisure hobby that involves an engine, such as motorhoming, is arguably not the greenest.

But motorhomes do a fraction of the average miles of a typical car and, as we always keep one eye on our electricity, gas and water consumption when away in our motorhomes, we're generally more frugal when it comes to energy consumption than say a holidayer staying in a large hotel.

That's why we decided to look at all things green in this issue. The simple fact that many eco additions and features that you can fit to your motorhome will save you money in the long-run is even more of a bonus.

This month, for example we've looked into the question of using premium diesel, which may be more expensive at the pump, but actually can save you money in the long run, as MMM road tester Jonathan Lloyd explains. Also, we look at powering a compressor fridge with only a solar panel.

Here, I also pull together tips on eco driving techniques. It's not just about a light right foot.

And we've still got your usual techy stuff. In Interchange our experienced motorhomers try to get to the root of a variety of motorhoming problems. But, don't just leave it to our team: if you've got hints or solutions of your own or want to tell us about a simple DIY job you plan to carry out, then get in touch. Write to us at the usual address or drop an email to interchange@warnersgroup.co.uk

Rachel Stothert

Driving an Autocruise Jazz for a lot of the sessions, my observer realised that many of the techniques covered are ideal for motorhomes, because it is all about smooth driving. A smoother driver can mean less road rattles, less risk of cupboards flying open (if like me you forget to press the locking button) and a more comfortable ride for the driver and passengers on a motorhome chassis, which can be a little harsher than your average car. And the smooth driving principle is good for your fuel gauge too.

ON THE ROAD

But it's not all about right foot, although the lighter your right foot is the further you will travel on a gallon of fuel. The key advice is to accelerate and decelerate (using the brakes as little as possible) gently. This means good anticipation of traffic and road conditions and layout.

In heavy traffic, it is better to drive slower but carry on moving than be continually stopping and starting, no matter how pressured other drivers make you feel. Try switching the engine off when queuing for more than a few minutes in heavy traffic.

I drove a Ford-based motorhome recently that had a gear shift indicator. It's there to show you when the optimal time is to change gear. While you may be annoyed that the vehicle is telling you how to drive, the advantage of following its advice will be the reward of less fuel stops.

It has been shown that you can improve fuel efficiency by not exceeding 2,000rpm when driving a diesel-powered vehicle. Moving quickly through the gears is more economical and getting into a higher gear in urban locations will save you fuel.

Reducing the demands on the engine can help – do you really need the air conditioning on? Unless you're in the hottest of countries (or have pollen allergies or other respiratory ailments) then opening a window at low speeds is more economical than running the a/c. However on

the flip side, several people suggest that you need to run the air/con once a week to keep the system in good shape.

Slower driving saves fuel. By reducing your speed on motorways from 70mph to 60mph you may be able to save up to nine per cent of fuel – drop your speed to 50mph and that saving may go all the way up to 15 per cent.

Finally, much of the advice I've read indicates that reversing into parking spaces or campsite pitches is better. So when you start in the morning you can pull straight out of the space and not have to bother with fuel-consuming slow-speed manoeuvres when the engine is cold.

MAINTAIN YOUR MOTOR

But it is not just about driving style – you should ensure your motorhome is in tip top condition, especially the engine, oil and tyres. Tyres are particularly important: under-inflated tyres offer up more resistance when driving and therefore use more fuel. Under-inflated tyres will also wear quicker and will provide less grip, especially when cornering.

However, suggested pressures from base vehicle and tyre manufacturers may not be ideal. Get your vehicle to a weighbridge, talk to a tyre manufacturer and get the recommended pressures for your weight of vehicle, increasing the pressure for heavier loads. And if you spend extended periods in hot countries with the 'van consider suggested pressures for warmer climates as well.

WEIGHT

Obviously, the more weight your engine is being asked to haul along, the more fuel you're are going to use. So take a long hard look at what you carry in your motorhome and then decide what you really need to carry – every kilo will make a difference, even if it is marginal. So ask yourself how many 'essential' accessories have you stashed away in the 'van just in case. Do you have deep storage lockers which you haven't seen the back of for quite some time? Do you really need to carry a spare kitchen sink for all eventualities?

ACCESSORIES FOR THE ROOF

You can't really do anything about what's up top already, but the more stuff you pile on the roof the more wind resistance your 'van will have. You can't do much about the fact that most motorhomes have the aerodynamics of a brick – but try not to add needlessly to its wind-resisting capabilities.

And, if you do have to add something to the roof, look for slimline roof accessories that don't stick above the line of the overcab or low profile moulding – new lighter, smaller products are being launched all the time, like satellite dishes and solar panels.

PICK A CONVENIENT SITE

It's been proven that driving short distances in cars are the most uneconomical journeys, so do some research before you go and find a site where you can leave the 'van parked up for a couple of days and walk, cycle or use public transport to get to the shops or local attractions. And, if you are not as fit as you once were, have a look at our electric bike feature on page 213 – they could be the green answer to your mobility needs.

WINTER WARMERS

Modern engines are much more efficient than they used to be, so starting up the engine to warm the cab or de-mist or de-ice the windscreen might seem like a good idea but will waste fuel. An idling engine returns zero mpg, the worst performance of all! ■

ECO DRIVING

There is no doubt, most of you will have heard about eco driving. Some of you may even have taken a course and now put into practice what you have learnt and are hopefully now reaping the rewards by paying fewer visits to the filling station.

Quite simply, eco driving is about driving as efficiently as possible to ensure that fuel isn't wasted. There's a lot of great advice out there, and, surprisingly, it is not all about that right foot.

Last year, I took an IAM Skills For Life course and subsequently graduated to become a full IAM member (after a nervy test).

