

MotorWeek Transcripts
AutoWorld 'Your MPG / My MPG'

JOHN DAVIS: One of the most valuable tools for comparison car shopping is the government's fuel economy estimates. Available online for cars dating back to 1984 and on the window stickers of new vehicles, these figures represent a standardized baseline for choosing the most economical vehicle that fits your needs. That's fine on paper ... but in the real world, the phrase "Your Mileage may vary" has never been more true ... and that's where a new online tool called "Your MPG" can help.

Developed jointly by the EPA and DOE and launched in 1999, fueleconomy.gov is the online home for official new car fuel economy mileage ratings, environmental impact data and loads of information such as gas-saving tips, station locators, clean, renewable fuels and advanced automotive technologies.

Last year alone, the fuel economy site hosted 40 million visitors, and tallied nearly 600 million page views. But information here is not a one-way street, as fueleconomy.gov has tapped its user base to create a section called "Your MPG" where drivers can log in and share their own fuel economy results, and anyone can browse them to find real-world economy figures for their own type of car or one they're shopping for.

The "Your MPG" database has 80,000 registered users, of which 30,000 people are actively tracking their vehicles ... That's real-life MPG information being shared on 9,000 different makes, models and model years of vehicles! Except for notations on the user's state of residence and the type of driving they do, postings are anonymous ... but we had no shortage of volunteers willing to tell us how they contribute, and what they take away from the site.

GEORGE W. PETERSON, OWNER OF A 2006 FORD FIVE HUNDRED: I'm a fact finder, and I love keeping track of facts. I do keep track of my mileage and every time I fill up, I do enter it.

One thing I hope to get out of it is my own knowledge that I'm getting the best mileage and the best use of my car.

ALAN SEASE, OWNER OF A 2010 TOYOTA CAMRY: I enter information into the website every time I fuel up the vehicle. I typically will get a little printout, jot my mileage down and once I get home I'll have a spare minute, I'll go ahead and enter that in. So with the two vehicles that I track on there I put in stuff approximately once a week, maybe twice a week, depending on how much driving I actually do.

DAVIS: 90% of "Your MPG" contributors enter data for one or two cars, but one user tracks an amazing 37 different vehicles! The most popular "Your MPG" vehicle is the

2005 Toyota Prius, with 182 drivers averaging 47.7 mpg. The largest amount of data for one car is 776 fuel purchases logged for a 1990 Mazda Miata over an 18 year period, while the highest claimed MPG is 92.3 for a 2000 Honda Insight in Arizona ... Must be that dry heat!

Since the site operates on the honor system, results cannot be verified, although math errors and certain suspect practices are investigated to weed out the ego-driven exaggerators and others who may try to skew the averages. Overall, and somewhat surprising, most conventional vehicles exceed the government highway rating, while hybrids tend to hit the combined City/Highway numbers spot on.

One common thread among contributors is that using "Your MPG" site has made them more aware of how driving style, traffic conditions, vehicle maintenance and even the weather can affect their fuel economy.

SEASE: Since I've started using "Your MPG," I have found that I'm a little more conscious of how I drive ... a little less stop and go if possible ... I try to extend it out, combining trips and drive a little bit more mellow.

PETERSON: I don't jackrabbit start, I don't drive more than about 10% over the speed limit and I do keep it sensible. I watch what I'm doing and I watch other people to try to alleviate getting into situations where it might increase my gas mileage.

DAVIS: Arming car shoppers with real-world fuel economy data while enabling drivers to proactively become advocates of efficient motoring is the formula that drives "Your MPG," and the results are a winning combination by any measure.