

Keep On

HAULING

How to manage soaring fuel prices to continue enjoying your chosen horse sport.

By Lauren Anne Back

You love to hitch up your trailer and head to trails, ropings, rodeos, or horse shows. But today's gasoline and diesel prices are giving you pause. You're not alone. Horse owners all over the country are concerned, but they're coming up with workable solutions. Here, we'll share these solutions, give you additional fuel-saving tips, and give you a handy chart comparing the fuel efficiency of popular hauling vehicles.



Photo by Jeff Beiden

Cowboys Cope

These days, a cowboy might get more nervous facing the cost of filling up his tank than having to face the competition in the arena. Keven Daniel, a team roping header who competed in the 2007 Wrangler National Finals Rodeo, estimates he spent almost \$30,000 on fuel alone last year.

Daniel crosses the country several times a year to get from his Tennessee home to the qualifying rodeos out West.

The cost of hauling horses to competitions has gotten so high that many cowboys, Daniel included, have stopped making trips home during the season. "It's getting scary, because the rodeos aren't paying any more than they used to, but the expenses are getting higher," he says. To cut down on travel expenses, some competitors are relocating to a more centrally located state, such as Texas.

Daniel says that the pressure to win is higher than ever, but going to too many rodeos can be a gamble. "You really have to make every one count, because if your travel costs get too high, you don't make anything at the end of the year."

He adds that many roping teams have started traveling together and are choosing just the bigger rodeos to cut down on fuel costs.

On the administration side, the American Cowboy Team Roping Association keeps costs down as much as possible to keep cowboys coming: "We've been able to keep our finals and our association affordable, which is appealing," says national business manager Mike Sweeney.

While professionals like Daniel, who put 70,000 miles on his truck just last year, are making fast changes to their lifestyle, Sweeney says that ACTRA membership is still strong. The organization has been known to attract local competitors, which might be the key to keeping their events popular.

Even though people are favoring big weekend rodeos over two to three smaller ones each week, both Daniel and Sweeney agree that if people stay flexible, they'll survive. "I don't see them giving up their sport," says Sweeney. "They're going to find a way, they're just getting more creative."

The Trail Less Traveled

Like many trail riders, Bev Landau Giacalone is handling gas-price spike the best she can. Giacalone, who's traveled from her Tennessee home to places as far away as Montana in past years, says gas prices have really cramped her style. "It's such a bummer, but with only eight- to nine miles-per-gallon, it is what it is!" she says.

To curb high fuel prices, Landau and her husband stuck closer to home last summer and visited old standbys. "For now, stay close to home, and start saving for a once-in-a-while big trip," she says.



Photo by Kent and Charlene Krone

Although she could fly to a trail-riding destination, Landau says she'd prefer to stay local and share the experience with her own horses.

The trail-riding destinations that have been hurt the most are the ones that rely on out-of-state customers. "It's shut down our business," says Marilyn Mitchell, owner of Gentry Creek Victorian Inn & Stables in Tennessee. Because of a 70 percent drop in customers, Mitchell has lowered the inn's prices. "There's no horse market anymore," she laments.

To other business owners, gas prices have meant a shift in the nature of the trail-riding business. Ann Maletzke, owner of Spur of the Moment Ranch in Wisconsin, says that guests are staying for longer periods of time, but coming less often. "People are holding off on making reservations—most likely to see if they can afford it," she predicts.

Nonetheless, Maletzke points out that compared to other vacations, trail-riding destinations can be a very cost-effective getaway, even with larger groups. "People need some kind of vacation, so we'll do all right," she says.

Since trail riders have reined in their travel pursuits, many businesses hope to provide guests with a more diverse experience that meets all their vacation needs. Spur of the Moment Ranch now features a spa as part of its strategy, while others now offer a variety of entertainment and outdoor adventures.

Even though fuel price woes have spread to every corner of the country, it hasn't stopped some riders from reaching trails far and wide. Many ranch, campground, and bed & barn owners are worried, but others say that the trail-riding business is staying strong.

In California, a state with frighteningly high fuel prices, Point Reyes Country Inn & Stables has continued to do well. Owner Tom Evans says that the inn's continued success is due to its key location near the Point Reyes National Seashore. "We're situated in an area where you can draw from a large pool of people," he explains.

Evans believes that people who are passionate about their horses are willing to look past the high costs. "The people who come here say, 'You know, these are our horses. We're going to do what we have to.'"

Across the country, horse folks are echoing Evans' assertion: "We'll pay what we have to, as long as we can keep riding." Indeed, some travel-related organizations are reporting steady numbers, such as the USRider Equestrian Motor Plan, a roadside-assistance company (800/844-1409; www.usrider.org).

Mark Cole, USRider managing member, says that its membership is growing at record pace. "We assume that horse owners are making adjustments in other areas of their lives, other than their equine pursuits," he says.

Of course, we already knew that it would take a lot more than expensive fuel to drive us away from our horses!

Fuel Facts

The fuel price crisis has left us all with a lot of questions: Whatever happened to dollar-a-gallon gas? And since when does it cost more to fill up with diesel? There are plenty of reasons why the gas pump is emptying your wallet, but here are the basics.

Crude oil, the "black gold" that comes straight from the earth, is the biggest expense in producing a barrel of gas or diesel fuel. As demand for crude increases and supplies decrease, the price goes up. (For more information, visit the U.S. Energy Information Administration's website, www.eia.doe.gov, and click on the FAQ section.)

While the United States is the world's biggest energy consumer, the demand in developing countries, particularly China and India, has exploded in recent years. According to the International Energy Agency, these two countries made up about 70 percent of the world's increase in energy demand from 2005 to 2007.

So what's the most we'll pay for fuel? Hard to say.

Eric Escudero, the American Automobile Association's Colorado spokesperson, says that predicting fuel prices is like predicting the weather — that is, difficult, due to changing conditions. In previous years, he notes, prices have dropped in the winter and spiked along with high demand during summer's popular travel days: Memorial Day, Fourth of July, and Labor Day. However, in today's economic climate, prices fluctuate on a daily basis.

And there's a bigger question for horse haulers: What's the deal with diesel? Why is it now more expensive than gasoline? Like gas, there's more demand. Also, diesel is a dirty fuel. Producers are switching to low-sulfur, less harmful fuels to meet stricter emission standards and passing these costs to the consumer. Plus, there's a higher tax for using diesel-fueled vehicles on the highway.

For a while, biodiesel looked like a cheaper alternative, but as of this writing, it's priced higher than diesel. Costs may drop as production becomes more streamlined, so keep this alternative fuel in mind. Biodiesel is more environmentally friendly than diesel fuel, and you can purchase it in every state. (For more information, visit the National Biodiesel Board's website, www.biodiesel.org.)



Photo by Rene E. Riley

GOT DIESEL?

You probably won't find the fuel efficiencies of diesel trucks listed anywhere, because the regulations set by the Environmental Protection Agency don't apply to heavy haulers. To see if your rig qualifies as a heavy hauler, add the weight of the vehicle to the amount it's able to tow; a heavy hauler totals more than 8,500 pounds.

You can calculate miles-per-gallon yourself with one caveat: While some estimates say that diesel-powered trucks will decrease by 20 percent in efficiency when hauling, there's no sure way to calculate the difference. But you can keep track of your towing vehicle's fuel efficiency from one trip to the next. (Note: If you do these calculations several times, you'll get a better idea of your vehicle's efficiency.) Here's what to do:

- Calculate miles driven. Start with a full tank, and either record the mileage on the odometer or reset the trip meter. When you need to fill up again, subtract the old odometer reading from the new one to figure out the total distance you've driven.
- Jot down gallons pumped. Check the pump's meter or your receipt to see how many gallons it took to fill up your tank.
- Do the math. Divide the number of miles you've driven by the number of gallons and you have your MPG!

Here's an example:

$$\frac{403 \text{ miles driven}}{31 \text{ gallons pumped}} = 13 \text{ MPG}$$



Photo by Heidi Nyland

WHAT IS YOUR TRUCK COSTING YOU?

	Truck/Model*	Typical towing capacity, lbs.	Overall MPG**	MPG city/highway	Fuel type	Annual fuel cost***	Base MSRP
Large 5,000 lbs	 Chevy Colorado/ GMC Canyon 4WD, 3.5-liter, 4-speed automatic	4,000	16	11/23	regular	920 gal./ \$3,680	\$15,085 - \$25,150
	 Honda Ridgeline AWD, 3.5-liter V6, 5-speed automatic	5,000	15	10/23	regular	970 gal./ \$3,880	\$28,000- \$35,090
	 Dodge Dakota 4WD, 4.7-liter V8, 5-speed automatic	5,650	14	9/20	regular	1070 gal./ \$4,280	\$19,805- \$31,470
	 Toyota Tacoma 4WD, 4.0-liter V6, 5-speed automatic	6,500	17	13/21	regular	885 gal./ \$3,540	\$14,280- \$26,115
Heavy 8,000 lbs	 Chevy Silverado 1500/GMC Sierra 1500 4WD, 5.3-liter V8, 4-speed automatic	7,500	14	10/20	regular	1050 gal./ \$4,200	\$17,000- \$38,860
	 Dodge Ram 1500 4WD, 5.7-liter V8, 5-speed automatic	8,500	13	8/19	regular	1170 gal./ \$4,680	\$17,900- \$40,685
	 Ford F150 4WD, 5.4-liter V8, 4-speed automatic	9,200	13	9/19	regular	1135 gal./ \$4,540	\$17,000- \$40,205
	 Toyota Tundra 4WD, 5.7-liter V8, 6-speed automatic	10,300	15	10/20	regular	1030 gal./ \$4,120	\$22,390- \$42,070
Commercial 8,000 lbs+	 Ford F250 4WD, 6.4- liter V8 turbodiesel, 5-speed automatic	12,500	10	7/16	diesel	1445 gal./ \$7,225	\$22,895- \$38,015
	 Dodge Ram 2500 4WD, 6.7-liter, 6- cylinder turbodiesel, 6-speed automatic	12,850	13	9/19	diesel	1175 gal./ \$5,875	\$26,190- \$42,920
	 Chevy Silverado 2500HD/GMC Sierra 2500HD, 4WD 6.6-liter V8 turbodiesel, 6-speed automatic	13,600	13	9/21	diesel	1115 gal./ \$5,575	\$24,370- \$40,680

*Truck and Prius information taken from ConsumerReports.com.

** Some estimates say that fuel efficiency goes down 20% when hauling—to see how this estimation affects your fuel efficiency, multiply your MPG by 0.8.

***Based on cost and amount of fuel used to drive 15,000 miles, considering overall mileage. Based on \$4.00 per gallon for regular fuel; \$5.00 per gallon for diesel, rounded to the nearest five cents. If you're paying more for gas, multiply the number of gallons listed here by the price you're paying per gallon.

Fuel-Saving Tips

Now, here are some fuel-saving tips to help you continue to enjoy your trail-riding and horse camping pursuits. (Note: These tips were compiled with the help of Bonnie Davis, consulting editor of *The Trail Rider*; Bob Welch, managing editor of *Spin To Win Rodeo*; AAA; and USRider.)



Toyota North American Pressroom

- **Buy new.** Since you have to drive a hauling vehicle, now is a great time to buy, because prices are down and newer models have better fuel economy than ever before.
- **Maintain your towing vehicle.** Work with a professional mechanic to keep your vehicle in top shape. Keep your engine properly tuned. Repairs can go a long way; replacing a faulty oxygen sensor can improve fuel mileage as much as 40 percent.
- **Keep tires properly inflated.** Check tire pressure regularly to maintain optimum air pressure, and to make sure the wheels are in alignment to prevent tires from dragging. This can improve mileage by around 3 percent. Properly inflated tires are safer and last longer. *Tip:* To find out how much air pressure is required, check your tires' sidewalls. Recommended pressure will be listed as "PSI," for pounds per square inch. Use a tire gauge to find out whether the air pressure is correct. Don't forget to check your trailer tires.
- **Keep track of your fuel economy.** A drop in your car's fuel economy can be a sign that your vehicle needs work. Regularly check and replace air filters; replacing a clogged air filter can improve a vehicle's fuel mileage by as much as 10 percent.
- **Use the recommended grade of motor oil.** Check your vehicle's owner's manual to see the lowest grade you can use. A grade that's lower or higher than necessary can lower your fuel mileage. Also, look for motor oil that says "Energy Conserving" on the API performance symbol to be sure it contains friction-reducing additives.
- **Plan your route in advance.** Find the shortest, easiest route to enhance your mileage. Avoid heavy traffic by

taking alternate routes and by traveling at non-peak hours.

- **Drive gently.** Avoid aggressive driving, and observe the speed limit. Fuel mileage decreases rapidly at speeds above 60 miles per hour. Each 5 mph you drive over 60 mph can translate to an additional 10 cents per gallon.

- **Stop with care.** When stopping, take your foot off the accelerator and coast, then gently brake to a stop. When you see a red light, slow down to give it time to turn green, so you don't have to come to a complete stop. Starting a rig from a dead stop eats fuel. Don't make

- **Think small.** Drive a smaller, more fuel-efficient vehicle when you're not towing. Don't use the tow vehicle as a passenger car.



Photo by Heidi Nyland

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the air conditioning.

- **Explore your own backyard.** In between trips, explore your home public lands, which not only offer trails, but also horse camping. You might be amazed at what you can find down the road. 

Lauren Anne Back is a regular contributor of *The Trail Rider* and *MyHorse.com*.

- jackrabbit starts; it wastes fuel and is hard on your horse.
- **Avoid excessive idling.** Idling gets zero miles per gallon. Vehicles with large engines (pickup trucks and sport utility vehicles) typically waste more fuel at idle than vehicles with small engines.
- **Use cruise control.** Cruise control will help you maintain a constant speed and, in most cases, will save fuel. Caveat: Don't use cruise control if you're tired or fatigued. In fact, if you're hampered in any way, you shouldn't be trailering horses.
- **Use overdrive gears.** Overdrive typically causes the engine speed to decrease. This saves fuel and reduces engine wear.
- **Use high gears.** High gears achieve the lowest engine RPMs, or how many times the engine will rotate in one minute. This will generate adequate power to maintain road speed while hauling a load.
- **Get the "junk out of the trunk."** Remove unnecessary weight from your towing vehicle and trailer.
- **Think longer, and less often.** Instead of hauling out for frequent day rides, plan a two- to three-day trail or camping adventure.
- **Double up.** Ask a buddy (or buddies) to go with you on a trail ride, and split the fuel cost.
- **Park in the shade.** Keeping your car as cool as possible in the summer will minimize fuel evaporation.

- **Stay cool, keep the A/C.** The aerodynamic drag caused by keeping the windows open uses fuel. Unless you're driving at slow speeds, rolling down the windows costs as much as, if not more than, turning on

HANDY RESOURCES

Here are several websites to help you keep down fuel costs.

www.fuelcostcalculator.com: The American Automobile Association's tool that helps you estimate how much gas your vehicle gas will use on your trip and what it'll cost.

www.gasbuddy.com: Find the cheapest gas prices in town or on your route across the country.

www.fuelclinic.com: Use this free software to thoroughly track your fuel expenses.

www.fueleconomy.gov: Compare fuel-efficient vehicles, and see whether your tow vehicle is on the best or worst list of vehicles in each class.

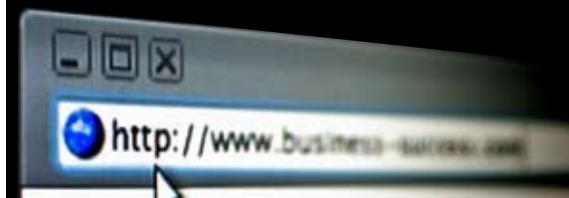


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