

Keeping Your Credit And Your Car Tuned Up



As gasoline prices climb higher and higher, so too has the overall cost of maintaining your automobile and keeping in on the road. Family Foundations recommends several preventative automotive care measures to keep your credit and your car tuned up:

- **Follow the manufacturer's recommended maintenance schedule.** Maintaining your car will help keep repair costs down, prolong the life of the automobile and allow the vehicle to continue to use fuel efficiently.
- **Analyze your current auto expenses.** Gather monthly operating and ownership costs including gas, repairs and other auto maintenance as well as the amount for the car loan, insurance, taxes and finance charges, respectively. Also calculate your average daily mileage for the week and weekends. Auto Web sites such as www.AAA.com have worksheets for assistance. How does your car stack up?
- **Buy smart, save later.** Not everyone can afford a hybrid vehicle, but with proper research and planning, everyone does have the potential to save big bucks. Check out a car's city and highway miles per gallon. Does the car get good gas mileage? Can you use regular unleaded gasoline or does it need premium fuel? Read all the fine print and check the seller's reputation. If you're buying a used car, verify the car's history.
- **Finance the right way.** Even if you have bad credit, shop around for the lowest interest rate. Places that appeal to buyers "regardless of credit" often will saddle you with a vehicle a more reputable dealer would have scrapped. Be sure to negotiate based on the price of the vehicle, not the monthly payment. As a general rule, don't sign up for a car loan longer than four to five years.
- **Make your commute easier.** Nearly one out of every six American workers commutes more than 45 minutes, each way. And nine out of 10 people drive to work, and drive alone. Consider carpooling with an office mate.
- **Maintain fuel efficiency.** There are ways you can adjust your driving behaviors and habits to save gas and keep more money in your pocket. Maintain steady speeds via cruise control, when appropriate. And avoiding speeding can result in better fuel economy. Make sure tires are inflated to the manufacturer's recommendation.
- **Be smart about buying gasoline.** There are many Web sites and local media that track gas station prices, but don't drive the extra miles to get the lower price - that's like throwing money out the window. Don't waste your money buying premium fuel if your engine calls for regular.
- **Find a good mechanic.** A good mechanic is like a good doctor, only for your car. A good mechanic will determine what needs to be repaired now versus the near future. A good mechanic knows only you can provide authorization to proceed with approved maintenance.
- **Take a crash course in money and credit management education.** While it is easy to lose track of how much you spend, the NFCC and its member agencies can teach Americans how to budget for the right car as well as how to manage ongoing operating and ownership costs.

Family Foundations stands ready to help. To reach us, call (904) 396-4846 or go online to

www.familyfoundations.org.

About Family Foundations

You don't have to solve your financial problems alone. Family Foundations has trained and certified credit counselors who offer financial management and debt reduction services. Family Foundations is a nonprofit, community-based organization and a Member of the National Foundations for Credit Counseling (NFCC). For more information on Family Foundations, call (904) 396-4846 or visit www.familyfoundations.org.