

AAA Survey Measures Effect of High Gas Prices on Members

2008-03-19

Gas mileage is most important criteria in determining next vehicle purchase

According to a recent survey of AAA Michigan members, the make and model of a car took the back seat to gas mileage as the single most important factor that will determine what kind of car AAA members will buy.

Gas mileage is ranked as the number one criteria members will use in their decision-making process, followed by make and model, safety features, performance, seating capacity and technology features.

"The survey results clearly demonstrate that gas prices have reached levels sufficient for consumers to dramatically alter their driving behaviors and car-buying habits," said Kathy Harrison, vice president and chief public affairs officer for AAA Michigan. "The results also show strong support for measures to reduce the country's dependency on foreign oil, including better fuel efficiency for new cars, trucks and SUVs."

When asked which measures lawmakers should pursue to decrease the country's dependency on foreign oil, AAA members responded:

Require better fuel efficiency for new cars, trucks and SUVs (61 percent)

Increase funding for research on alternative fuels (56 percent)

Allow more drilling and oil exploration in North America (52 percent)

Increase public transportation options (48 percent)

Establish national conservation programs (35 percent)

Increase taxes to reduce public's driving habits (9 percent)

In response to record-high gas prices set in 2007, a high percentage of AAA members took steps to conserve fuel. Among the most popular measures:

Consolidate shopping trips when possible (76 percent)

Drive a more fuel-efficient vehicle (30 percent)

Perform routine maintenance more frequently (27 percent)

Revised summer vacation plans (23 percent)

Share rides/car pool (19 percent)

Canceled summer vacation plans (17 percent)

Use public transportation more often (3 percent)

Purchase a hybrid vehicle (2 percent)

No change in driving habits (22 percent)

As a result of the latest survey results, AAA Michigan predicts that fuel economy will continue to weigh heavily on the minds of consumers as the spring and summer driving season approach, with the potential to set new gas price records.

"Unlike other periods of dramatic fuel increases, the latest price spike does not appear to be driven by rising physical demand for gasoline or even tight inventories of available fuel," said Harrison. "It is instead being propelled higher largely due to unprecedented levels of investment in crude oil and gasoline futures as a hedge against a dollar that is falling against other major currencies."

This article comes from Hotel Resource

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The URL for this story is:

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