

FLEET INDUSTRY NOTES

“Eco-Driving” Cuts Fuel Consumption

Tests performed by Ford Motor Company show that motorists coached by eco-driving experts can significantly improve the fuel economy performance of their cars, trucks or SUVs.

Eco-driving refers to specific driving behaviors that can improve fuel economy, save money, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote safe driving. Ford and Phoenix-based Pro Formance Group have teamed up to pilot an eco-driving program for fleet customers. The program would employ certified master trainers to deliver hands-on coaching to maximize mileage in everyday driving.

Over a four-day period, Ford and the Pro Formance drivers conducted validation tests using volunteers from Phoenix who were given individual coaching on specific driving behaviors. The Sports Car Club of America verified the results, which showed an average 24% improvement in fuel economy as a result of hands-on eco-driving training.

The drivers who took part in the validation tests saw results ranging from 6% fuel economy improvement to more than 50%, depending on their driving style and ability to master eco-driving behaviors. Eco-driving instructors coached drivers to employ smoother braking and accelerating, monitor their engine's RPMs and drive at a moderate speed.

“By working with Pro Formance to conduct validation testing, Ford is proving that eco-driving techniques are teachable and work across a broad spectrum of vehicles and drivers,” said Drew DeGrassi, president and CEO of Pro Formance Group. “It's a great initiative for Ford to lead in this country. It's not the end-all solution for America to obtain energy independence, but it is

an important part of it.”

Among the eco-driving practices that drivers can begin practicing on their own are driving 55 mph instead of 65 mph, keeping tires properly inflated at the recommended pressure, and eliminating prolonged idling.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration reports that the nation uses close to 150 billion gallons of gasoline annually. If every American practiced eco-driving and got the EPA-estimated 15% benefit in fuel economy, more than 22 billion gallons of gas would be saved.

Hands-on instruction is critical for achieving eco-driving's full potential since instructions for eco-driving techniques must be customized after instructors have had the opportunity to observe individual driving habits and then provide coaching for more fuel efficient driving techniques.

“We are talking with fleet owners first, because they have large numbers of vehicles and drivers that could realize significant benefit from such training,” said Curt Magleby, director of Governmental Affairs at Ford Motor Company. “Ultimately, all drivers can benefit from practicing eco-driving, and one day it may be considered mandatory as part of all new drivers training.”

EDITOR'S COMMENT: *The automotive industry is swamped with ideas on how to improve fuel economy and reduce global dependence on fossil fuels. We have tougher CAFE, hybrid-electrics, the promise of hydrogen, and a host of other ideas in various stages of development. But the one answer that eludes most drivers—and many fleet managers, too—is common-sense driving.*

Ford's quantitative analysis of eco-driving demonstrates that conscientious driving behavior can save more gas than many of the high-tech