



Hyper-miling

by Phoebe Barnard

Okay, so you're aware of Climate Change, and of the need for us all to make some pretty urgent changes to the way we live. But you own a car, and with the state of Metrorail, you find it's pretty difficult (even if cheaper) to get to work by train or taxi. Can you drive a car, and still fight Climate Change?

Well, the short answer is, "not really." Unless, that is, you own a locally-produced electric car which runs on clean power; or a fuel-efficient petrol or diesel car, and carry passengers. Society is still near the start of a transition away from cars run on petrol or diesel, towards those run on clean electricity-or fuel-cells. Until a Somerset West company launches its sporty photovoltaic car, the *Joule*, in 2010, and until widespread subsidies are introduced to make clean cars affordable, we'll need to make the most of every amber drop of fuel by using our cars more efficiently. But meanwhile, there's still much that you can do to drive better, smarter, and more efficiently, with the car you have.

Like most of the working classes, I spend much of my time commuting ... at least 90 minutes a day during the week. That adds up to quite a chunk of my life, and most of my carbon-footprint, but I can't move to the city and I can't work closer to home. Most of my lift-club colleagues at work - smart, well-educated, well-meaning environmental professionals - find all sorts of excuses to take their own cars most days, too. So I challenge them (and entertain myself during this time) by 'hyper-miling'.

Hyper-miling is a way of driving super-efficiently, to get 'hyper'-mileage from every drop of fuel. The essence of hyper-miling is:

- Make your accelerator-foot feather-light. Pretend you are bicycling, where every kilometre is an effort. So you don't rush up to streetlights, or down hills ... coast sublimely.
- Never brake when you can ease off the accelerator. Braking is wasted energy. Do it only when you really have to.
- Drive as if you have a glass of water on the dashboard - or a carsick pregnant lady in the passenger seat.
- Multiply your passengers. Never drive when you can cycle, walk, run, or carpool. You save money, save the Planet, get to

know your neighbours, and get fit at the same time. Really.

You'd be surprised how easy hyper-miling is, and how much money it saves - if only you can park your testosterone at the door when you slip in the driver's seat. You might think this is the ultimate entertainment for sad nerds, but you'd be wrong! Try it - but take some passengers along to help foster a competitive edge. This helps your fuel economy per person, of course....

I used to love to drive fast, and to 'go for the gap'. I drove a zippy Golf 1600 and put it through its paces in Namibia. Nowadays, as a city driver, my aim is altogether leaner, calmer and more austere. I drive serenely, economically, freewheeling down Ou Kaapse Weg (not recommended for learners!), turning off the engine at long lights and traffic jams (an expected wait of two minutes is enough, if your engine turns over smoothly), and keeping the aircon off unless I'm going downhill and roasting alive. I've replaced the thrill-of-the-chase with the pleasure of bopping down the M3 to good music, and trying to get the fuel consumption of my Honda Jazz down to 4.9l/100km from its average of 5.4. In short, I guess, I grew up, and learned to get my thrills in cleaner ways.

Some people modify the chassis of their car to make it more aerodynamic. You may not really want your car looking like a rocket, but cars will be more and more aerodynamic and efficient in the future anyway, after a 30-year decline in fuel-efficiency standards. Times have changed. Two years ago, motoring magazines extolled a car's 'torque' and 'muscle'. Now they praise its clean emissions,

styling and fuel-economy, and eagerly await the launch of the *Joule*.

My friend Mark used to be a boy-racer. He's a smart policy analyst who also drives a Honda Jazz. Over the last three years I've seen him replace his tendency to throttle up around corners with a super-competitive hyper-miling streak. "Check this," he'll say. "We've been in the Southern Cape for a week on 4.9l/100km - beat that!" Normally, I can't. Secretly, I suspect he resets his dashboard fuel-economy meter at the top of Silvermine before coasting downhill, so that when I look at it, it's always lower than mine. But nonetheless, I'm optimistic. The male competitive urge has been channelled, for a change, in an environmentally-useful way.

Of course, much of humanity is taking time to catch up with Mark. You may have seen an old-style boy-racer on Ou Kaapse Weg or the M3 - the driver of a black Maserati who amuses and annoys the rest of us by tailgating closely at 100km/hr, then swerving and overtaking in a noisy blaze of carbon-fumes to catch up with the next car, throwing on his expensive brakes when he realizes that car is also travelling at the same speed as everyone else but himself. The Metro Police are wise to this guy. They've been staking him out for days, and biding their time before pouncing. I take a perverse delight in imagining the pounce.

Some people, alas, just have too much testosterone, or too much money, for hyper-miling. But they're fast becoming the 'sad minority'. Like me, they'll have to learn to get their thrills in cleaner ways. ☺




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The owner of this 18-year-old Honda Civic modified it with handtools to raise it from 80km/4.5l to 150km/4.5l.

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Insects
Ensure at least one section of wall on each side of your property has gaps, slats or holes all the way up to let low flying insects pass from property to property.