



FUEL-EFFICIENT ERRANDS

How to get things done while being easy on your car

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You've heard the one about combining trips to save on gas? Yeah, right.

Our go-go lifestyle makes it pretty difficult to run errands just one day a week, let alone plan the perfect the route for maximum fuel efficiency -- difficult, but not impossible.

"If you plan your errand time well, if you make a transportation route that saves time and gas, then consolidating many errands into one trip makes sense," said K.J. McCorry, CEO of eco-officiency, a consulting firm in Boulder, Colo., specializing in eco-friendly lifestyle practices for the home and office.

You'll use less fuel and reduce wear and tear on your car, which means more pennies in your pocketbook. Plus, you'll save yourself a serious headache.

"Knowing that you will have the whole week's worth of errands run can eliminate a huge amount of stress," Ellen Pidde of 2nd Hands Errand Services in South Beloit, Ill., said. "You'll never miss running out at 10 p.m. trying to find snacks and drinks for the next day's soccer game or school party."

Get the whole family involved

"Organization is the key. Start a routine and stick to it," Pidde said. "The most effective way to get the whole family on board is to have a list and a deadline for everyone's requests. If your errands are run on Monday, then the family has to get their requests in by Sunday night."

Create one central location to keep track of shopping lists -- and keep it simple. Wall calendars and dry-erase planners make it convenient for everyone in the family to add items to the to-do list and stay organized.

"If the family has a system of communicating and tracking what errands need to be done, it avoids the last-minute crisis to pick something up," McCorry said.

Plan the best route

Prioritize your list. The most important things should get done first. If you run out of time or just run out of steam and need to call it an early day, at least you've got the essentials covered. When possible, combine the low-priority and out-of-the-way errands with your daily commute to work.

During the big weekly trip, save time by minimizing needless browsing. Make a note of how much time you plan to spend at each location, from entering the store to loading the car.

"This will help keep individuals from getting wayward in a retail location," McCorry said.

From your starting point, determine the most logical route between stops and avoid retracing your route to save on fuel. If you own more than one vehicle, take the one with the best gas mileage.

When possible, choose one-stop shopping. Find a location where you can do your banking, grocery shopping, movie rentals and dry cleaning without adding extra miles to your trip, then park and walk between destinations.

Beat the crowds

Skip going out at the lunch hour, as traffic is at its peak. Mid-morning and mid-afternoon are the best times to beat the crowds, McCorry said. After all, less time idling in traffic means more gas in the tank.

"Make sure you go at a time when all the errand locations are open," she said. "If you have to run errands at the end of the day, start with the store that will close first then work your route from that first location."

Keep it interesting

If errands are truly a chore, ask a friend to join you. You'll both save on gas by carpooling and the camaraderie may be just the thing to get you through the grind.

Be sure to plan a few quick stops for fun. Grab a quick lunch at your favorite restaurant, give yourself 20 minutes to browse at the bookstore or indulge in one of those fancy espresso drinks at your local coffeehouse.

"Some people enjoy running errands, others don't. For those that don't, adding a 'treat' can always make it a little more enjoyable," McCorry said.

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