

Fuel efficiency relies on a number of factors

BY VINCE HANCOCK
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Recent high gas prices have sent many of us on a search — sometimes to extremes — for better gas mileage.

Take spoilers — those horizontal fins on the back of a car — they turn more heads more than increase aerodynamics.

Dean Jamison, owner of Precision Tune in Traverse City, agrees that spoilers can make a car look sportier.

“But if you’re going to the grocery store down the road, no, it’s not going to help you,” he said.

Jamison is sympathetic to car owners who want to economize, especially when the backyard mechanic is greeted by modern vehicle design, with inaccessible fuel filters and hidden spark plugs.

Newer models often place the fuel filters inside the gas tank, said Jamison.

“It used to be a preventative maintenance issue,” he said. They don’t have to be

changed often — only every 100,000 miles — but their inaccessibility can mean one less option that consumers can use to increase efficiency.

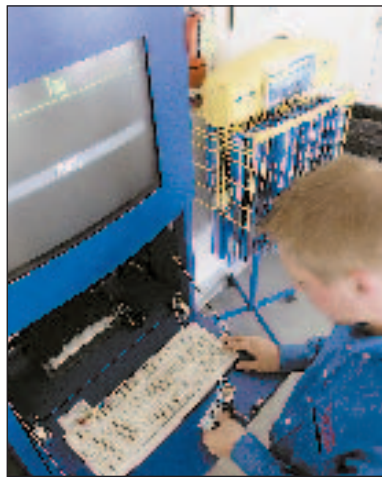
For fuel filters that can be accessed, special attention should be paid to cars that are driven infrequently.

John Keillor and his father own Northstar Automotive in Bear Lake. Even with a low yearly mileage, Keillor said he often discovers plugged fuel filters.

“If you’ve got an older vehicle that sits quite a bit, that fuel tank does rust inside,” said Keillor. “Unless you keep it full, you’ll get condensation, and it’ll rust if it sits a lot. So it picks that junk up, of course, and it winds up in the filter.”

This is why fuller tanks of gas can help efficiency — less condensation can form, and the filter has a longer life.

Another part that can be changed by the consumer is the air filter.



Record-Eagle/Douglas Tesner

Ray Szmoniak, a technician at Traverse Motors, tests an automobile with their new diagnostics system.

“If the engine can breathe better, it can run better,” said Jamison, but he adds that visual inspection can’t always tell you when — it might need changing before it’s choked

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