



Motorists are advised to avoid peak-hour travel, as frequent stops, slow movement, and constant braking can increase fuel consumption. PHOTO/GEOFFREY OYET OKWERA

How to make every litre of your fuel last

With petrol now nearing Shs5,400 per litre in Uganda, motorists are feeling the pinch. But as **Geoffrey Oyet Okwera** reports, smarter driving habits, regular servicing, and a few small changes can slash fuel consumption and save you thousands every week.

100

The numbers. Petrol prices have risen by about Shs100 to Shs149, bringing the average to around Shs5,250 per litre, with many fuel stations in Kampala selling between Shs5,350 and Shs5,399. Diesel has also increased to about Shs5,150, up from roughly Shs5,000.

When you visit fuel stations in Uganda today, you will notice a slight increase in fuel prices across the board. To make the most of the fuel in your tank amid these unpredictable costs, motorists need to adopt smarter driving habits that maintain efficient fuel consumption even during periods of price hikes.

Simon Kaggwa is a testimony to this reality. The Shs80,000 he used to spend to travel to Jinja from Kampala has now risen to Shs100,000, an increase that can be managed, he has since learnt, by adopting better fuel-consumption habits.

"I used to accelerate hard and brake suddenly, especially in traffic," Kaggwa says. "But after a mechanic told me that aggressive driving can waste up to 20 percent of my fuel, I changed my style. Now I drive smoothly, and that Shs100,000 takes me much further."

Kaggwa's experience reflects what every Ugandan motorist currently faces. Last month, fuel prices edged up, with motorists paying more



AT THE PUMP: ARE YOU GETTING WHAT YOU PAY FOR?

Sarah Mboijana recalls a frustrating experience after purchasing fuel worth Shs50,000 at a station outside Kampala. Expecting the fuel to last several days, she was shocked when her vehicle ran out the very next day.

Unfortunately, her story is not unique. Some fuel station attendants may exploit unsuspecting customers by dispensing less fuel than paid for. Protect yourself with these simple habits:

- Verify the pump rea-

ding before and after fuelling. Ensure the display is reset to zero before dispensing begins. • Insist on a receipt as proof of purchase. • Watch the fuelling process when possible, or use stations with good reputations. • Know your tank capacity. If filling from empty, the amount dispensed should match your vehicle's stated tank size.

A few seconds of attention at the pump can save you from losing thousands of shillings worth of fuel and the frustration of running empty far sooner than expected.

Shs5,399 per litre of petrol as global market tensions continue to filter into Uganda's economy. Petrol prices have risen by about Shs100 to Shs149, bringing the average to around Shs5,250 per litre, with many fuel stations in Kampala selling between Shs5,350 and Shs5,399. Diesel has also increased to about Shs5,150, up from roughly Shs5,000.

Although the hike may appear modest on station price boards, experts say motorists can respond by adopting smarter driving habits that encourage more sustainable fuel consumption.

Uphold better driving skills

Stephen Damulira, a road safety specialist and driving instructor in Kampala, says vehicles are like human beings: their "lifestyle" greatly influences their health and lifespan.

"Drive smoothly and maintain a steady speed," Damulira advises. "Avoid sudden braking, harsh acceleration, and unnecessary gear changes. All of these put extra strain on the engine and increase fuel consumption."

He adds that careless driving directly increases fuel use and raises the risk of breakdowns. Aggressive acceleration and abrupt braking strain key engine components, causing the vehicle to burn more fuel and wear out faster.

One striking comparison: driving at 80km/h instead of 110km/h on a highway such as the Kampala-Gulu highway can cut fuel consumption by up to 25 percent. Over a month of regular travel, that saving can easily cover a full tank.

Plan your journeys

Damulira also advises motorists to avoid peak traffic hours, when frequent stops, slow movement, and constant braking increase fuel use. Instead, choose less congested routes that allow steady movement and the

use of higher gears, which helps the engine run more efficiently. "If you are stopping for more than a minute, switch off the engine to save fuel," Damulira explains. "Maintaining a safe distance from other vehicles and anticipating traffic changes improves efficiency and prolongs the vehicle's lifespan."

Richardson Ojok, a bus driver with a company that schedules most routes at night to avoid the heavy traffic of the day, says Bwaise-Kawempe stretch travel allows consistent speeds, which reduces fuel consumption. "Bus companies have since adjusted night schedules, noting that less strain on the vehicle from heavy traffic, less tyre wear, and lower maintenance costs."

Another simple way to track fuel is to monitor your driving habits in real time. Many modern cars have dashboards or mobile apps that track fuel consumption, distance, and average speed. By paying attention to these indicators, motorists can identify which driving behaviors waste fuel, such as frequent acceleration, long idling, or over-revving the engine. Making small adjustments immediately can translate into significant savings over a month.

Follow service schedules

Daniel Lwanga, a car service specialist, says regular servicing significantly reduces fuel consumption by ensuring all systems operate with minimal resistance and optimal combustion.

"When we service a car, we drain the engine oil and replace it with fresh oil to ensure smooth, uninterrupted driving and reliable combustion," says Lwanga. "It is also important to check air filters and replace them if defective."

He offers three additional tips:

- Use air conditioning sparingly. The AC draws power to run the compressor, making the engine burn more fuel, especially in heavy traffic or city driving.
- Maintain correct tyre pressure.

Under-inflated tyres create more rolling resistance, forcing the engine to work harder. Properly inflated tyres save fuel and reduce tyre wear.

• Reduce unnecessary weight. The heavier the vehicle, the more fuel it needs.

Do not always carry unnecessary weight in your car.

Does it work?

Kaggwa decided to test it. For two weeks, he avoided harsh acceleration, switched off his engine during long waits, and removed a heavy toolbox he had been carrying in his boot for months. He also checked his tyre pressure and used the AC only when necessary.

The result? His Shs100,000 fuel budget for the Kampala-Jinja round trip now stretches to cover two trips instead of one, effectively saving him nearly Shs50,000 a week.

"I used to think fuel efficiency was about buying a smaller car," Kaggwa says with a laugh. "Now I know it is mostly about how you drive and a little about what you leave at home."

With petrol prices unlikely to drop sharply anytime soon, that lesson is worth its weight in gold or, these days, in shillings.

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MAINTAIN,
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