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FUEL SAVING NEEDS MORE THAN TIPS AND TRICKS

New Sunday Times, Malaysia



ENERGY CRISIS

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FOR three decades, I have built a career as an "uncle reviewer", poking around engine bays, analysing transmission logic and telling Malaysians which car deserves their hard-earned ringgit.

I have spent thousands of hours explaining how to squeeze an extra kilometre out of every litre of petrol.

But as we stand here in April 2026, with the global energy crisis tightening its grip and our domestic fuel landscape shifting beneath our feet, I have to be totally honest with you: we cannot "hypermile" our way out of this global fuel crisis.

During a recent session on Astro Awani, I was asked to share strategies for the rakyat to reduce their petrol usage.

While I can — and will — talk about "eggs under the accelerator" and maintaining tyre pressure, we must acknowledge that these are individual band-aids on a national wound.

If we are serious about preserving our national fuel stockpile and protecting our energy security, we need to stop obsessing over the car and start obsessing over the system.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE EMPTY SEAT

Let's start with the hard truth about our roads.

Look at the Federal Highway or the Damansara-Puchong Expressway during the morning crawl. It is a slow-moving river of metal, a sea of five-seater cars carrying exactly one person each.

We don't have a "too many cars

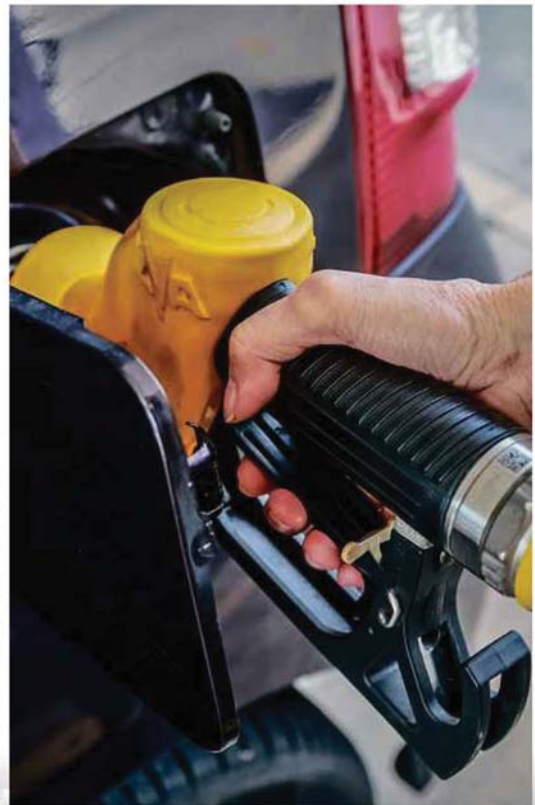
problem in Malaysia; we have an "empty seat" surplus.

Car-pooling is often dismissed as a logistical nightmare or a social burden. And in many ways, it is. Our urban sprawl makes the "first-mile, last-mile" detour to pick up a colleague feel like an exhausting chore.

But in an era where unsubsidised RON95 has climbed to RM3.87 for some and the national subsidy bill continues to strain our treasury, car-pooling must move from a "good idea" to a financial necessity.

Even if you can't commit to a five-day-a-week arrangement, a "Carpool Tuesday" or a "hybrid commute", where you meet at a central landmark, reduces your personal fuel burn and vehicle wear-and-tear by 20 per cent instantly.

That is a 20 per cent "pay raise" that requires zero engineering.



We cannot 'hypermile' our way out of this global fuel crisis; the problem is systemic, not individual.

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Malaysia does not have too many cars — it has too many empty seats.
NSTP FILE PIX



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THE CASE FOR NOMINAL FARES

However, the burden shouldn't just be on the driver. We have world-class rail infrastructure in the Klang Valley.

The MRT Putrajaya line is humming and the LRT3 Shah Alam line is finally nearing its long-awaited June launch.

Yet, these multibillion ringgit assets are often underutilised while the roads beside them are choked with idling engines burning subsidised fuel.

Why? Because the "friction" of public transport — the cost of the daily commute, the lack of seamless connectivity and the mental load — still doesn't outweigh the perceived sanctuary of a private car.

It is time the government considers a radical shift: making our LRT, MRT and stage bus networks either free or nominal.

If we treat public transport as a critical national utility rather than a profit centre, the economic math changes.

Every Malaysian who trades a steering wheel for a train seat is a direct contributor to the preservation of our national fuel stockpile.



We are currently spending billions every month to keep pump prices manageable; redirecting a fraction of that to move the masses for free is not a "cost" — it is a strategic investment in energy security.

UNLOCKING THE EV SHIFT

Then there is the shift to EVs. At Elektronikar, we monitor the pulse of the transition daily.

While road tax structures have become more favourable in 2026, we are hitting a massive bottleneck in the charging ecosystem.

Currently, charge point operators (CPOs) face high commercial electricity tariffs and complex "maximum demand" charges from Tenaga Nasional Bhd.

This forces them to keep the cost of public DC charging high, often reaching parity with the cost of petrol.

This kills the primary incentive for the middle class to switch.

The government needs to introduce a dedicated "energy transition tariff" for CPOs.

If we lower the cost for the operators,



they can lower the cost for the users.

When charging an EV becomes undeniably, significantly cheaper than pumping RON95, the market won't need "awareness campaigns" or tax rebates to switch.

The rakyat will do the math themselves at the plug.

In contrast, when we look at Thailand, the public charging landscape is much more favourable to EV owners than in Malaysia.

Firstly it is heavily defined by time-of-use pricing, which creates a massive gap between those who plan and those who don't.

For public DC fast charging, rates typically fluctuate between 7.5 baht to 9.5 baht per unit (kWh) during "on-peak" hours (roughly RM0.98 to RM1.24).

However, for ultra-fast high-power chargers (300kW and above), prices can

soar as high as 11 baht.

Here we hardly have any chargers that can match their ultra fast units and yet our prices start at around RM1.50 in the majority of places and CPOs.

This has sparked a national debate in Thailand, as these rates bring the running costs of an EV dangerously close to those of a fuel-efficient petrol car, threatening to erase the "green" economic incentive entirely.

As we know, land transport take up more than 25 per cent of national emissions and remains one of the last bastions of oil and gas, removing this may help us transition to renewable energy at a faster pace as more homes will see the benefit of installing solar and battery.

THE MOTORCYCLE OPTION

If we really want to talk about reducing

petrol consumption and reducing traffic congestion, two-wheelers are a great option.

Of course we all know the statistics for road accident and fatalities do not favour two-wheelers and if you decide to buy anything bigger than a 200cc machine, you are not helping to save the planet, those fast bikes are fun but they are relative gas guzzlers.

Even smaller ones can become gas guzzlers if not maintained properly, but they do have the potential to reduce congestion and idle time and stress.

If you are confident of your riding skills and be sensible when on the road, this is definitely one option worth exploring.

THE ROAD AHEAD

We often treat fuel saving as a hobby for the frugal or a niche topic for enthusiasts. It isn't. In 2026, it is a survival strategy for a nation navigating a volatile global energy market.

Yes, keep your car serviced. Yes, remove that 40kg of "junk in the trunk" that you've been carrying since last Hari Raya.

And yes, imagine there is an egg under your accelerator every time you leave a traffic light. But as a nation, we must demand more.

We need a transport landscape that doesn't force us to burn fuel just to get to a job to pay for that fuel.

We need nominal fares, lower energy tariffs for charging and a collective realisation that every litre we don't burn today is security we keep for tomorrow.

The era of "cheap" motion is over; the era of "smart" motion must begin.