

Diesel vs Gas

Diesel mileage is better, but is it a better buy?

By **ROCKY GRIMMER**
 With gas prices rising and the availability of gas shrinking, the North American motorist has begun to look at alternatives to the gasoline guzzler.

One alternative is the diesel engine, which has increased in popularity as gas prices have increased. Volkswagen, for example, has reported an increase in diesel Rabbit sales in Canada from 1,700 in 1977 to 7,400 in 1978 to 6,723 in the first eight months of 1979.

But the advantages of the diesel engine are still not clear.

This popularity is largely attributed to the diesel's mileage, which is greater than that of its gasoline engine equivalent.

The standard four-speed gasoline VW Rabbit gets about 27 miles per gallon in the city and 45 on the highway. The diesel Rabbit does 43 urban and 62 highway.

The gasoline Oldsmobile Cutlass gets 19 urban and 30 highway while the diesel Cutlass gets 28 urban and 43 highway.

The Peugeot 504SL manual four-speed gas model gets 25 mpg. urban and 33 mpg. highway. The diesel version gets 38 mpg.

both in the city and on the highway.

Diesel fuel costs the same as most regular leaded gas at 23.4 cents a litre (\$1.06 per gallon) but is cheaper than regular unleaded sold for 24.8 cents a litre (\$1.12 per gallon).

Of course in the event of a further gas shortage, the diesel car owner would not be as severely affected as the gas car owner.

The diesel has an ignition system without points, condensers, sparkplugs and distributors, eliminating the need for tune-ups for these parts. The diesel needs less maintenance than the



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gas engine, but close attention has to be paid to the filtering system and the air cleaner and the injector must be cleaned and recalibrated. Also, most diesels require an oil and oil filter change every 3,000 miles, except the VW Rabbit which needs to be changed every 7,500 miles.

However, the diesel is certainly not flawless. You have to pay extra for the diesel engine, and the price varies according to the make of car. For example, the diesel four-speed VW Rabbit costs \$400 more than its gas counterpart.

While operating costs of a diesel may be a bit lower, it's not necessarily cheaper to own a diesel.

The Volkswagen Rabbit diesel retails at \$400 more than its gas counterpart. All diesels cost more than the gas-driven models.

So what you save in fuel costs may be eaten up by that initial investment. For example, using the

highway mileage you would have to drive your diesel Rabbit 60,000 miles in order to recoup that initial \$400 investment.

The Peugeot diesel, with not as great a mileage difference and a \$400 premium, and the Olds Cutlass diesel with a \$500 premium, make even less economic sense.

Consumer Union road tests showed some diesels such as the Peugeot, were very noisy and lack of power hampered the acceleration of all diesels.

A gasoline engine provides more power than a diesel engine of the same size. For instance, the gas Rabbit manual-four has 71 horsepower and the diesel 48.

Furthermore, diesels emitted sooty, smelly exhaust fumes caused by the chemical compounds in diesel fuel. These fumes varied in intensity according to the type of car.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) studied the effects of the emission from the diesel engine and found that a typical diesel car emits 13 lbs. of particulate matter for every 10,000 miles — roughly fifty times as much as a gasoline car.

The EPA estimates that if diesels accounted for 25 per cent of all new auto sales, the combination of diesel cars, trucks and buses would put 328,000 tons of particulates into the air. This would make the diesels the largest mobile source of par-

ticulate emissions and add to the existing problem of urban pollution.

However, the diesel's emission of carbon monoxide and unburned hydrocarbons are even lower than that of a gasoline car equipped with a catalytic converter.

In 1979 all diesels met the government standard for the emission of nitrogen oxides, but the big diesels, such as General Motors V8s, will find it difficult to meet the proposed 1981 standard.

Starting a diesel engine in winter is a little more inconvenient than a gasoline engine. In cold weather, diesel fuel congeals, and although glow plugs in the diesel car are designed to alleviate this problem, kerosene has to be added to the diesel fuel at temperatures lower than -7C. In addition a block heater is necessary.

If the economic and mechanical disadvantages of the diesels were eliminated, there would still be the problem with availability of diesel fuel.

Service stations with diesel fuel are scarce and found with certainty only on truck routes. In Metro Toronto there are only 33 stations with diesel fuel: Mississauga and Oakville three apiece and Etobicoke two.

This scarcity may entail driving out of your way every time you need fuel. On long driving trips, it may also mean worrying about the location of diesel outlets on your route.

However, the diesel engine advocates maintain that since diesel mileage is so good, a tank full of diesel fuel would offset these inconveniences.

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