

Wheels: An e-mail from David says, “I am the sole owner of a 1998 Camry (4 cyl) with 128,000 miles on it. It is in seemingly great condition, as I have maintained it with great care, with regular oil changes (4,000-5,000 miles) and all the other routine maintenance requirements. But since November, 2006, (tune up) and new tires (December, 2006, Goodyear Comfort Treads), my fuel economy has decreased 12-15%. At first I thought it was the colder winter temperatures, but spring has brought no improvement. I used to get 29 mpg when I drove at 70-75+ mph (2,700-2,800 RPM), before the cost of gas skyrocketed. After 9 years experience with this car and some experimentation, I became convinced that 2,400 RPM represents the “sweet spot” for maximum economy in this car, but I can’t prove it!

My slower speeds did increase my fuel economy to the point where I was getting 550-570 miles per 18 gallon tank (31-32 mpg), but since November, 2006, my mileage has dropped to as low as 465 miles (26 mpg). I just replaced the air filter and got 520 miles out of my latest tank (29 mpg). Throughout March and most of April I was never able to get more than 500 miles out of a tank of gas. I don’t use any one particular brand of gas. Air pressure is proper, and alignment is good. Engine RPM at various speeds has not changed. There are no oil leaks or smoky exhaust emissions.

I mentioned this to my local Toyota dealership (who does most of my maintenance) and they said that without the “Check Engine” light illuminating (it’s not), there’s nothing they can do. I did notice some mild engine surge at idle a month or 2 ago, but that stopped and has not recurred. The car looks great, runs great and seemingly has no problems, except the decline in fuel economy. It has definitely been the most solidly reliable car I have ever owned, and I envision keeping it for another 100,000 miles!!

Any ideas? (PCV valve, some kind of vacuum leak, the new tires, or ??) Or is increasing vehicle age/mileage the primary culprit? Or am I being too “anal” over “normal” fuel economy fluctuations?

Haldeman: With your history with the vehicle, it appears that something happened and that could be two things:

1. The tires are very good and survey but may not be low rolling resistance (LRR) type tires.
2. Try adding a few psi to the tires to see if this helps.

There is nothing you can do about the fuel economy although with that many miles adding a can of Techron to the gas may help.

The advice from a Goodyear engineer is, “The tires could be some of it. Worn tires give the least rolling resistance so depending on what the old tires were, there could be 2 mpg between old, low rr (like if they were OEM tires) and the new, deep non-skid ComforTreds. I can easily see 1 mpg difference. I looked up this vehicle and it has an 18.5 gallon tank and is EPA rated at 23/30 mpg.”

