Wall and ceiling contractors aren’t all that involved with vehicles or fleets. But the coming oil/gasoline pinch—a squeeze that many predict will be with us for a long time—can play havoc in normal business operations unless some careful planning is implemented.

One plastering contractor in El Paso, Texas, saw the crunch and service station lines coming and converted all of his vehicles to propane. He estimates the extra option cost about $700 per car or truck—and figures on additional maintenance savings because of the cleaner burning offered by Propane.

“I’m reasonably well set for just about any fuel problem now,” he explained. “My vehicles can burn gasoline or they can operate on Propane. With Propane running about 43¢ a gallon, you can see that it’s not all that expensive for me—and I won’t be held up by shortages.”

A New England drywall contractor—realizing that his business requires him to drive a minimum of 100,000 miles a year—made his move shortly after the iaWCC/GDCI convention in February.

Inasmuch as his house is oil heated, he leased a Mercedes Benz 300 diesel.

“There were two reasons for me to go to a Mercedes diesel,” the drywall contractor said. “I can always run the car on home heating fuel—and the large geographical area that I must cover daily puts a premium on driving comfort.

“If I’m going to spend that much time in a car I want a vehicle that will provide more than mere efficiency—and I felt a Mercedes was the most logical option.”

That’s two approaches followed by contractors. For the most part, though, options are restricted to a rather narrow range and more efficient use of existing vehicles is the safest course of action.

Simple Steps For 15% Improvement

When it comes to gaining more efficient use of motor vehicles a whole series of techniques are available.

Tires are very important for improving gas mileage. Experts recommend use of radial ply tires with proper inflation. This can usually add 3-4 miles per gallon—more if you’re willing to give up a cushioned ride for the bouncier ride that higher pressures in the tires cause.

The greater the air pressure the less friction between the tire and road surface. Also, it’s a good idea to keep all tires properly balanced and aligned. In addition to excessive wear, misaligned or unbalanced
tires also add to gas-consuming friction. The efficient vehicle owner will also use 10W-40 oil. It’s much more slippery than number 30 or 40—and reduces piston resistance.

In a series of tests, the National Automotive Council found that proper driving style can add another 9% to fuel economy.

Here’s how this works:

Try and develop a very fluid style of driving, experts say, and try to reduce brake use to an absolute minimum.

This can be accomplished by driving well back from the car ahead, using what safety specialists refer to as the “Two Count Lag.” In other words, when the car ahead of you passes a reference point such as a telephone pole, a cement culvert, etc., you should be able to count “A-Thousand-One, A-Thousand-Two,” before your car passes the same point.

Driving at this distance is generally regarded as the safe minimum distance for response time in case of a sudden emergency—and also allows you to take your foot off the accelerator when the car in front slows down. Any closer and you usually need to apply brakes. The “Two Count Lag” allows you to glide down.

Stopping your car and having to start up obviously uses more fuel—much more. In city driving where a full stop is apt to be necessary, try not to jam on the brakes.

Two driving habits are gasoline guzzlers. They are energetic acceleration and high speeds. Both should be avoided even to the extent of practicing a slow, even acceleration at stop signs and lights.

Keep Oil Warm To Save Fuel

For contractors who live in areas with extensive cold weather, overnight parking in a garage is a fuel saver.

Fuel efficiency for the first five miles of driving with a cold engine is only half what it would be had the car been kept warm overnight—or at least not exposed to excessively low temperatures.

Cold oil in an engine is a heavy, gelatinous mass that is resistant to the movement of the engine. It’s only when oil becomes slippery that parts move ‘with reduced friction—and only warm oil is slippery.

From the Department of Energy comes the comforting word that any major gasoline shortage will probably be avoided this year although prices will continue to climb. The real problem is expected next year when unleaded will account for some 50% of total usage.

Many contractors may be wondering, too, about the potential in gasohol (a 10% blend of grain alcohol with gasoline). Early tests are quite impressive. In Illinois, cars fueled with gasohol 90 days showed a 32.2% reduction in carbon monoxide emissions, 7.4% reduction in hydrocarbon emissions and an average increase of 6.14 miles per gallon.

Don’t discount the interest in this mixture. The Germans used it to great advantage in World War II and proponents say gasohol is a clean-running fuel that helps to eliminate sparking off.

Admittedly, the big disadvantage is the cost. It’s now 8¢ more per gallon than unleaded—and the danger is great when station operators have to do the mixing.

Selection Process Best Fuel Saver

While the immediate future doesn’t hold a bright promise for a technological breakthrough to solve the fuel problem, automotive people do have some solid advice on the best fuel conservers—the initial process of selecting cars and car engines.

The commonsense rule that they keep referring to is to concentrate on matching true driving needs to what’s available. You shouldn’t, they say, choose an engine solely on the basis of fuel economy.

As an example, if a buyer finds a 1968 Cadillac in impeccable shape and working condition for $1,000—he’s getting a good value. That’s because a new, fuel-economical Volkswagen Rabbit at $6,000 would take 10 years of driving before the $5,000 difference could be made up in fuel savings—provided, of course, that fuel rationing doesn’t rear its ugly head.

The main question to ask yourself is how much and what kind of driving is done. Diesels don’t make all that much sense for everyone de-
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despite the fuel savings they represent. Except for the Mercedes (a special case because it’s often more of an investment than a purchase), diesels

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**Advantages in soaring oil prices**

Rising cost of oil, gas and other petroleum products means that some companies may retain extra earnings without paying an accumulated earnings tax. Reason: The court ruled several years ago that a business may accumulate cash to cover itself when supplies become unstable. Now, a court has ruled specifically that a company may retain earnings to:

- Handle the larger cash commitment required to deal directly with a refiner rather than a middleman.
- Cover the cost of buying petroleum on the spot market.

Recommended: Companies retaining added earnings to cover the increased cost of petroleum products must be able to back up their retained earnings plans with solid arithmetic.


**Oil’s impact on depreciation**

Look into increasing the company’s depreciation deduction on next year’s tax return. Reason: The deduction is based on estimated useful life of an asset. But inability to get proper lubricants or unwillingness to pay exorbitant costs for certain grades—all due to the oil crunch—may shorten the useful life of some machinery and vehicles. Point: Handle depreciation accordingly.

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cost more than gas engine cars. An Oldsmobile diesel costs at least $800 more, and a Rabbit costs about $200 more.

Consider, too, that demand for diesels far exceeds availability, that they have an unpleasant smell and are noisier and you can see that diesels are not all advantage.

The true advantages, though, are greater fuel economy, lower maintenance, higher resale value, and—in the event of gasoline rationing—diesel fuel may not be included. In 1973-74, remember, diesel fuel was excluded.

The best customer for a diesel is the one who drives a lot, goes relatively long distances and for whom fuel obtainability is a significant factor. Also, one who won’t be bothered by the odor.

Despite adverse publicity, the big engine gas hog can be more economical, again depending on the work it’s asked to do. An eight-cylinder engine moves weight with much less effort than a small-cylinder engine. Furthermore, they run more smoothly, with fewer vibrations.

The front wheel drive is considered advantageous for everyone because of its greater traction.

In the last analysis, fuel conservation is a matter for careful planning and this takes place from the initial decision on the type of vehicle and motor right down to the kind and availability of fuel.