Drive better for best mileage

BEST is holding refresher courses to help drivers improve their technique

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If your fuel costs are worrying you, they needn’t. A new study shows that by making just minor adjustments to the way you drive, you can significantly bring your fuel bills down.

The preliminary findings of the study, conducted by faculty member Kavi Arya and research fellows Rahul Mundhe, Sachidanand Malewar, and Nandan Marathe of the Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay, show that you can cut your vehicle’s fuel consumption by as much as 20 per cent.

“Slow driving is common in Mumbai due to bad roads and traffic bottlenecks,” Arya said. “This consumes maximum fuel. In such conditions, the driver’s role becomes extremely important for fuel efficiency.”

The study employs data recorders, which are normally used for post-crash analyses, to help people to drive more efficiently. Data on the driving pattern for 1000km is fed into the device, based on which it makes mathematical calculations indicating the changes in style that the driver must make to be more fuel efficient.

“The device records and analyses the relationship between the driver and the vehicle,” said Malewar. “It then rates the driver on a scale of 1-10.”

The team has fed over 76 hours of driving styles into the hardware. “Once we finish feeding data, we can differentiate between good and bad drivers and create the ideal model,” Malewar said.

The study cites the BEST bus service as an excellent example of how better driving can help conserve fuel. The fleet comprises over 3,500 buses — each of them running 217 km daily on average. They cover 90 per cent of the Mumbai roads, serving around 45 lakh passengers every day. The expense incurred by BEST on fuel is almost up to 40 per cent of its total running cost.

The average mileage of a single-decker bus used to be about 3.1 kilometre per litre (kmpl). Better driver technique raised it to 3.4 kmpl. Big saving indeed as each 0.01 kmpl improvement results in a saving of Rs 4 lakh per month for the undertaking.

Vinayak Amdekar, assistant general manager (traffic operations), BEST, says they are holding refresher courses regularly to help drivers better their skill.

During the course, drivers are given to test drive vehicles fitted with transparent fuel tanks. After each trip, senior officials gauge the fuel usage and give the driver tips to improve his technique. The driver is then put through more trial drives until he achieves the benchmark set for fuel efficiency. For more perfect assessment of its drivers, BEST will soon be using data recorders.