



## Driving In America

Posted by [Dave Cohen](#) on May 17, 2006 - 12:08am

Topic: [Miscellaneous](#)

Tags: [automobile](#), [drivers](#), [fuel economy](#), [fuel efficiency](#), [gasoline](#), [interstates](#), [mpg](#), [mph](#) [[list all tags](#)]

**Update [2006-5-17 18:31:22 by Dave]:** I've added some 3rd day notes at the bottom of the story.

I am driving I70 from Boulder on my way to Pittsburgh in my 1988 blue VW Jetta.

□  
*Dave's Car (not really, but close!)*

So with oil a shade under \$70/barrel and gasoline at about \$2.80/gallon on the interstate in the Midwest, I thought I'd report on what's going on out here. I hope you'll add your comments to this brief road trip report. I'm sure many of you have plenty of experiences to report.

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I am moving, so my car is loaded with stuff. With the extra weight, the miles per gallon is down somewhat but still probably over 30. The tires are properly inflated and relatively new, so I'm not losing efficiency there. Moreover, the motor was tuned up before the trip, so that's covered. The speed limit varies but is usually 70/mph with a minimum of 40. I'm driving about 65/mph in the righthand lane. Why? Because everyone else is doing 75 to 85/mph, probably because they are in a big hurry, as almost all Americans seem to be, and don't even realize or care that [fuel efficiency](#) decreases dramatically (depending on the vehicle) at speeds over 60/mph.



However, if I drive any slower, I become a road hazard. One thing to note (I've long seen this) is that people drive *really fast in packs* (like wolves). You'll be driving alone for a while, not a car in sight when out of the blue, one of these vehicle wolfpacks is right on top of you moving about 85/mph and there's the biggest long haul truck that you've ever seen tailgating you. And he's really pissed that he had to slow down to 65 and couldn't pass you because the rest of the pack is taking up space in the passing (lefthand) lane. I can honestly say that the only people I've passed (going 65) are slow movers pulling out of rest areas.

Remember when Jimmy Carter told us all to slow down to 55/mph? In any case, no one I've seen cares at all about what is also referred to as [fuel economy](#).

The exurban and suburban sprawl began about 30 miles outside of Kansas City in both directions (west of it in Kansas and east of it in Missouri). I took note of the Walmart Supercenter at about the 30 mile mark in Missouri.



*It seemed to be out in  
the middle of nowhere*

I'll add one last thing. Some miles outside of Kansas City at about 3:30 PM CDT I ran into the first of several traffic jams on the interstate as I tried to negotiate my way through the city to the other side. The highway was in total disrepair just as I've seen in other heavily traveled areas. In my old hometown, Boulder, road maintenance used to be seasonal. Now, it's constant--all year round on the major roads. Not all the traffic jams were due to repair. There was just one hell of a lot of cars & trucks out there. The wear and tear on the national highway system (started during the Eisenhower administration) is appalling. Well, it's been a horror show so far and I don't expect it to get any better.

Columbia, Missouri with 2 days to go. Signing off.

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Just outside Indianapolis, 1 day to go.

The big news I heard today was from an AM radio station in which I heard that Texas is considering [raising](#) the speed limit to [80/mph](#).

But a study by the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) found that 85% of drivers on the affected highways already drive 76-79 mph, says Carlos Lopez, the agency's traffic operations chief.

TxDOT has been studying the proposal since the Legislature last year authorized

increasing the speed limit from 70 or 75 to 80 mph in 10 mostly rural counties.

Which means that people in the affected areas will actually drive 86 to 90/mph. Various callers to the talk show praised the idea.

The closer I got to Indianapolis, the faster and more aggressive the drivers were, especially the trucks. I was tired and didn't feel like dealing with nonsense, so I pulled off early to preserve my own life and those of others. Road conditions did improve after Missouri, so some of the comments on this thread are certainly correct about the roads there.

Rough calculations show that I'm getting at least 35/mph. Not bad for an 18 year old car. Later.



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