

MotorWeek Transcripts

CAR KEYS 'FUEL SIPPERS'

DAVIS: To be sure the high price of gas is weighing heavily on consumers' minds. So let's see if we can help ease that headache with the keys to a trio of our favorite gas sippers. With gas prices showing no limit, it's no wonder that small cars are enjoying their best sales resurgence in decades.

After a year driving the Nissan Versa, we were convinced it represents the modern, efficient small car to a "T." While available in both 5-door hatchback and 4-door sedan, it is the hatchback Versa that delivers 5-passenger car-pooling versatility.

Versa power sound unimpressive; a 1.8-liter 4-cylinder engine with 122-horsepower. But it is surprising spirited, attached to a 6-speed manual, 4-speed automatic, or Xtronic continuously variable transmission.

Government fuel economy ratings for the Versa manual are 30 city/34 highway, 28 city/34 highway with the automatic and 30 city/36 highway for the CVT. Our long-term manual tester averaged 29 miles-per-gallon.

With the CVT, the Versa's Energy Impact Score is a low 11.8 barrels of oil per year, with a small 6.3 carbon footprint.

At a base price of \$13,370, the Nissan Versa is a great deal both in the showroom and at the pump.

Another cool little car that will cool your temper when you fill it; is the 5-door Honda Fit. Twenty-inches shorter than Honda's Civic, the Fit counters its tidy exterior with an airy, clever interior that features the second-row "Magic Seat." It folds flat, upright for tall items, and even into a lounger.

Fit power is a tiny 1.5-liter 4 with only 109 horsepower. Trannys are a 5-speed manual and automatic. The Sport automatic adds steering wheel paddle shifters.

Best government fuel economy ratings are 28 city/34 highway with the manual and 27 city/34 highway with an automatic. Our base Fit auto averaged 33 miles-per-gallon. It's Energy Impact Score is only 11 barrels of oil, with an equally low carbon footprint of only 5.9.

Starting at \$14,585 the Fit is a few dollars more than most rivals. But its flexible interior, and fun to drive nature make the frugal Fit most inviting.

Adding trendy style to the gas saver priority is our favorite shoe-box-on-wheels, and our 2008 Drivers' Choice Award winner for Best Small Car, the Scion xB.

The well equipped 5-door xB is also amazingly versatile with an SUV-like 70 cubic feet of cargo space.

And thanks to Toyota's punchy 158-horsepower 2.4-liter 4-cylinder engine, it has the power to pull its load, with either a 5-speed manual or 4-speed automatic with manual shift mode.

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Both yield government fuel economy ratings of 22 city/28 highway. We averaged 24 miles-per-gallon. It uses 14.3 barrels of oil per year, with a 7.7 carbon footprint. Good for a small vehicle that can haul big.

And, does it for a small car base price of \$16,270.

So if gas prices are making you ill, grabbing a set of keys for any of these economical little cars will seriously ease the pain of your next trip to the pump.