

On the Extension Line Article

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Hidden Costs of Cycles/Scooters May Outweigh Gas Savings

If you are like most people, you're trying to find ways to beat the high cost of gasoline. One way some are doing this is to ride a motorcycle to work. When people learn that some motorcycles get 60+ mpg and scooters often get over 100 mpg, a frequent comment is "I'm getting one"! Indeed, sales of motorcycles and scooters are at an all time high. Before making your decision, though, consider some of the hidden costs associated with cycle ownership.

If you are purchasing a motorcycle or scooter to save money on gasoline, calculate how long it will take you to break even on your investment. Let's say you drive a pickup or SUV that gets an average 17 mpg and you drive 425 miles per week - or roughly one 25 gallon tank of gasoline. Fuel at \$4.25 per gallon will cost you about \$106 a week.

Let's take the same scenario with a motorcycle that averages 60 mpg (most motorcycles get much less). Driving the same 425 mile distance as your pickup or SUV will only cost you about \$30 a week. So your yearly fuel costs for the truck or SUV would be \$5,512 as opposed to \$1560 for the cycle. Wow, what a savings you think! But is it in the long run?

If you purchased your motorcycle used at a price of \$4,000, it would take you just about a year of daily riding to break even with the gas savings. A hidden cost of motorcycle riding is the fact you're at the mercy of the weather. In Alaska, it would be almost impossible to ride a motorcycle everyday (or at least very foolhardy). Rain, snow, wind and plain old cold weather will limit when you'll want to ride.

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A really optimistic estimate that you will ride your motorcycle 1/4 of the time means it will take more than four years or 22,100 truck/SUV/auto replacement miles to break even using your fuel savings.

As stated earlier, most motorcycles don't get anywhere near 60 mpg. In fact, they commonly get much less than 40 mpg. The gas mileage only gets worse with larger engine sizes. The calculations for this article are based upon 250 cc size motorcycle engine. Motor scooters typically have 49 cc size engines and can get better than 100 mpg, but their top speeds of around 30-40 mph make them unsuitable for highway use. It is distances driven and gas efficiency of the vehicle that make the difference.

Another issue to consider is safety. Lacking the protection of a metal cage, seatbelts and airbags, cycles are inherently more dangerous to operate than even the smallest car. Motorcycles are also harder for many drivers to see because their eyes are "looking" for other automobiles, not a person on a bike.

Of course, people don't always do things just because they make sense. For many, cycle riding is just plain fun and higher gas prices may be just the excuse needed to convince themselves or a spouse that now is time to make the purchase. Now is the time to buy if this is you!

Whatever you decide, buy carefully. Used motorcycles and scooters suffer from a much higher rate of neglect than a used automobile. The best deals are often found in newspaper classifieds and on websites such as Craigslist. Unless you are an experienced cycle mechanic, it is worth the expense of letting a qualified mechanic "check-out" the bike you are considering buying.

The motorcycle and motor scooter market has recently been flooded with inexpensive Chinese motorcycles and scooters. While the phenomenally low price (often 1/4 less than mainstream bikes) is attractive, the quality is often poor, there can be very limited parts support and some insurance companies are refusing to insure them for street use. Your best bet is to stick with a major brand American, Japanese or European bike. As the old adage goes, if the price seems too good to be true, it most likely is!