DANGER – High Costs Ahead… THINK Before You Fill Up Your Car…

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Accidentally filling your vehicle with the wrong type of fuel can cost you

dearly in time and money – in addition to the price of the wasted fuel.

A report by our special guest contributor Miss Fuelling…

Many of us (including me!) have done it; others have come oh-so-close… I'm talking about filling your vehicle with the wrong sort of fuel. Today's forecourts always seem to be ultra-busy and when there is a queue of cars behind you there's additional pressure to get your car in front of the pump, fill it up, pay and get away, as quickly as you can. That's fine, but the pressure can lead to mistakes.

The other day I was under pressure time-wise to get a number of work visits done during the day. The car I was driving (a faithful diesel-powered Vauxhall) was getting low on fuel and I had 200 miles to cover during the day, so, as advised by my better half, I thought I had better fill up rather than risk running low and drawing up the sediment-laden dregs from the bottom of the tank, or, even worse, running out in the middle of nowhere.

I pulled into the fuel station and things were manic, with vehicles 'everywhere' and many customers seemingly on a 'go-slow' day. Therefore, when my chance came to ease the Vauxhall in front of the pump, I duly filled it up with £55 worth, paid and drove off. After 10 miles (and, to its credit, the car was running fine), I made my first work halt of the day, only to find that the car would not restart when I needed to drive on to my second call.

I phoned my better half, who said, "Okay, let's go through this logically… Was the car running okay prior to the halt and refusal to restart?" (Yes it was). "Has it enough fuel in the tank?" (Oh yes, I proudly advised him that I had filled it with petrol). "Petrol – or diesel?" …was his next question. (Oh bother, it was petrol). "That's great, but it's a diesel powered car" was his stunned response". (Oh bother, blast, etc.).

Luckily our long-suffering garage-owning pal (actually, the 'Grumpy Old Mechanic' from this website) came to our rescue and towed the car to his establishment, where he duly drained the fuel tank and pipework (in fact, the whole system), flushed it through and added fresh diesel. Thankfully the car then re-started straight away and since then has covered several

hundred miles without any apparent ill effects. Phew.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

It is estimated that in Britain, around 400 people each day put the wrong type of fuel into their vehicle. The vast majority of these have put petrol into a diesel powered car. One problem is that the nozzles on petrol pumps are smaller than those on diesel pumps, so it is very easy to insert a petrol pump nozzle into a diesel car's filler neck (which is exactly what I did). Bear in mind that, although more difficult, it is also possible to fill a petrol car with diesel fuel.

Depending on the vehicle, you may be lucky (as I was) and the fuel system may survive, but in some cases the entire fuel system may need to be renewed.

Some modern cars have devices installed to prevent mis-fuelling, but not many. Aftermarket devices can also be acquired to do the same job…

MINIMISE POTENTIAL DIFFICULTIES…

In theory it should be easy to avoid this problem, but of course life isn't always that simple… especially if you are often changing vehicles, and particularly between petrol and diesel-powered models (as I do).

These tips may help:

1. When you arrive at the fuel station pump, THINK before you reach for the pump hose/nozzle.
   Is the vehicle you are driving petrol or diesel-powered? If you are not sure, look at the tachometer/rev counter (if the vehicle has one); typically a petrol engined car will have the 'red line' rev limit at between 6,000 and 7,000 revs per minute (rpm), whereas with a diesel engine, more usually the red line is between 4,000 and 5,000 rpm.

2. Check the pump labelling and its hose colour…
   In the UK, green indicates unleaded petrol, black is for diesel.

3. Look for labels in the vicinity of the vehicle's fuel filler cap…
   Often a label will state 'Diesel' or specify 'Unleaded' and the RON rating, but of course labels can go missing or become illegible, and many older cars didn't have a label to start with!

4. If you realise at once that you have put the wrong fuel in the tank, DO NOT attempt to start the engine.
   In the case of diesel-powered vehicles, the fuel acts as a lubricant for the fuel pump(s) and by contrast unleaded petrol is, effectively, a solvent which can permit metal-to-metal contact within the pump's finely-machined components.

   Advise the forecourt staff and contact your favourite garage or emergency breakdown service to ask for assistance. The time and cost involved in draining the wrong fuel will be minimised by NOT running the engine or even turning on the ignition (which may activate the fuel pump(s). If you turn on the igntion and/or start the engine, the incorrect fuel will be drawn through the pump(s), filter(s) and injectors, and can cause serious damage. The time needed to fix this problem, and the cost, will then spiral.

5. You MIGHT just be lucky…
   If you estimate that you have added less than 10 per cent or so of the wrong fuel to the quantity already in the tank, you may get away with this by filling the tank with the correct type of fuel, then topping-up again as soon as you have used, say, another five litres or one gallon (approximately). In this way the system will be flushed through and should be okay. If you have added more than 10 per cent, seek professional assistance before attempting to run the car.

   IN MY CASE

   Thankfully the dear old Vauxhall is performing and running as well as ever, thanks to the

kind assistance of the Grumpy Old Mechanic – who in fact was helpful, reassuring and extremely efficient in sorting out the car; grateful thanks from me. Yes, it was all my own fault, but in future I'll be more careful!

My other half is being very careful not to gloat, as he knows very well that I can point out some silly things that he himself has done with/to vehicles…