

THE OMBUDSMAN FOR SHORT-TERM INSURANCE WARNS CONSUMERS ON FUEL SAVING DEVICES

In today's world of steeply rising fuel prices, it is easy to understand why consumers want to take every advantage available to minimise the pain at the fuel pumps. The temptation is therefore great to turn to so-called fuel saving devices, be they in the form of gadgets fitted to fuel lines or fluids or tablets added to fuel to save some money.

Such fuel saving devices however need to be approached with caution, if not avoided altogether. The first question consumers must ask themselves is, do these devices really save fuel as promised, and, secondly and more importantly, if so, why do the vehicle manufacturers not fit these devices or recommend the use of such devices? With the pressure on vehicle manufacturers to produce the most fuel-efficient vehicles in the market, it is a big red flag that these devices are not fitted by manufacturers, or that they do not recommend adding tablets and fluids to fuel.

Consumers not only run the risk of wasting hard earned money on such devices that provide no fuel savings but run the greater risk of the possibility that the use of fluids, tablets or gadgets not recommended by manufacturers may actually harm their vehicles' fuel system components.

Modern vehicles have complex systems that regulate fuel intake and exhaust gas recirculation, and these systems are very sensitive to any additives introduced to the fuel system, other than the lubricants or fuels recommended by the manufacturers. Manufacturers follow very strict guidelines when engineering their vehicles, and work closely with the manufacturers of lubricants and fuels, who create products to provide the best lubrication and fuel efficiency for specific vehicles. By adding untested tablets and fluids to a vehicle, may inhibit the ability of the recommended fuels and lubricants to function properly.

This may end up being a costly exercise in futility for consumers. Not only will they not have saved any money on their fuel costs, but they may also have to foot the bill for repairs to their vehicles which may run into thousands of rands.

It is also important to note that most, if not all, motor vehicle insurance policies that offer comprehensive cover exclude liability for mechanical malfunction or failure. Further, even if the consumer has a mechanical warranty policy in place that covers mechanical breakdowns, such policies also exclude damage caused by a consumer not following the manufacturer's recommendations.

Ultimately, the onus rests on consumers to follow manufacturers' recommendations. The best and most proven way to save fuel is still to exercise good driving habits and there is a host of resources available to consumers on these. The bottom line is that the old saying in this instance still holds true today – if you are pennywise, you may end up being pound foolish.