

Economic Concerns Shift Americans Attitudes about Their Cars

3M Car Care's Second Annual "Elbow Grease Economics" Study Shows that Car Owners Now Look at Their Vehicles as Valuable Assets Worthy of Maintenance, Preservation

As the economic slide continues, Americans are focused on preserving their assets and protecting their household budgets. And when it comes to their vehicles, Americans now look at their cars as valuable assets worthy of investing time and elbow grease to keep them running and looking good, so shows the second annual 3M "Elbow Grease Economics" national study.

In "Elbow Grease Economics", a study of 1,835 car owners in the United States, 3M Car Care found that a growing number of consumers are taking their car maintenance into their own hands -- and on their own driveways -- as their household budgets continue to tighten and their economic fears grow. And the younger generation of car owners ages 18 to 34 is even more focused on caring for their own cars, creating a new wave of automotive do-it-yourselfers.

Key findings of 3M Car Care's "Elbow Grease Economics" include:

Just over one-third (36%) of car owners consider their car to be one of their biggest investments, although for those making between \$50,000 and \$75,000 annually, this increases to 42 percent.

Nearly half (49%) of car owners are dependent on their cars to get to work or find a job. This is even higher among men ages 45 to 54 at 65 percent.

More than one-third (34%) of car owners feel they have to take better care of their car now because they can't afford a new one.

For some respondents, the economy is so worrisome that 3 percent say they are afraid they might have to live in their car if their home is foreclosed.

Buying New vs. Keeping Longer

The majority (55%) of car owners in the United States are planning on keeping their cars longer and have no plans to trade in or sell their current car at this time. More than 80 percent (84%) are committed to doing the maintenance needed to keep them running

Nearly one-fifth (19%) of car owners used to think they could just go buy a new car if necessary, but now they say they know they can't afford it.

This is even higher -- 25 percent -- among Baby Boomers ages 45 to 54, reflecting their concerns over pending retirement and tight household budgets.

There is pent-up demand for new cars, as more than two-fifths (42%) are considering trading or selling their current car for another model but haven't done so yet. Key reasons include:

21 percent of car owners trust their current car, even though it's older

19 percent aren't confident in the economy or do not want to take out another loan

10 percent aren't sure what will happen with the Big Three U.S. automakers

5 percent cannot get an auto loan

4 percent say their loan payout is larger than their car's value -- but for men and women ages 35 to 44, this increases to 8 percent and 14 percent respectively

Nearly 40 percent (36%) of car owners are planning to trade in their car for a new one or make improvements/repairs on their current car once the economy improves. For those making \$75,000 or less annually, this increases to 45 percent.

Some 13 percent of car owners are planning to trade in their vehicle for a new car, although this jumps to nearly 20 percent among men ages 18 to 34 (18%) and 35 to 44 (20%)

11 percent are planning to make the repairs they've been postponing like having dents and scratches repaired
8 percent are planning to take their car in for professional engine service or detailing
Some 7 percent of younger car owners ages 18 to 34 are planning on adding performance components or audio electronics

Driving Less to Save Dollars

Even though fuel prices have stabilized, car owners are still focused on keeping their automotive costs to a minimum and preserving the maximum life of their vehicle.

More than half (56%) of car owners are driving differently today than they did two years ago

Some 40 percent of car owners are driving less to save on gas costs and vehicle wear-and-tear. For those making less than \$35,000 annually, this increases to 52 percent

One-fifth (20%) are driving less aggressively to protect the engine

Nearly 20 percent (17%) are driving more cautiously to avoid accidents or body damage

Some 5 percent of all respondents are carpooling whenever they can, while this triples to 15 percent among those ages 18 to 25

Maintenance and Repair

Vehicle maintenance is more of a priority than ever before for car owners, particularly as the average age of American vehicles reaches nine years old.

The biggest challenge one-third (30%) of car owners face with their current vehicles is keeping it running without having to make or pay for lots of repairs

For 22 percent of car owners, getting better fuel mileage is a priority, while keeping it looking good is tops for 11 percent

One-quarter (25%) said they pay more attention to the maintenance needs of their car now, compared to two years ago

Nearly 30 percent (27%) are doing their car maintenance themselves or having friends or family members do it

Some 6 percent of these respondents have just started doing their car maintenance themselves after having it done professionally in the past. This increases to 9 percent for car owners ages 18 to 25

Nearly 30 percent (29%) of car owners are doing small maintenance tasks themselves like oil changes and light bulb replacements. This is even higher for owners ages 18 to 34 with 43 percent of men and 37 percent of women tackling these tasks. It also is higher (43%) for households making less than \$35,000 annually

More than one-quarter (26%) of car owners are taking better care of the appearance to keep their cars looking new. For unemployed car owners, this increased to nearly 30 percent (28%)

Some 15 percent of car owners – including 30 percent of men and 21 percent of women ages 18 to 34 -- are doing tune-ups themselves or using performance additives to keep their engines in good condition. This also is a popular task among households with incomes of less than \$35,000 annually (21%) and those making \$35,000 to \$49,999 (22%)

Approximately 5 percent of car owners are doing body repairs like fixing scratches or repairing dings and dents. Learning how to do the maintenance themselves is a priority for 6 percent of all car owners – but for those ages 18 to 34, it jumps to 10 percent of men and 12 percent of women

Young Drivers Influence the Market

There is a new generation of automotive do-it-yourselfers on the way as young car owners focus on learning car care skills or tackle projects themselves.

Nearly 20 percent (18%) of car owners 18 to 25 are paying more attention to their car's maintenance than two years ago. About one-third (34%) of those 18 to 25 are doing their car maintenance themselves or with a friend or family member. Nine percent of these young drivers have just taken over the maintenance after having it professionally done previously

Of the maintenance projects done by car owners ages 18 to 25, the most popular include:

37 percent are doing small maintenance tasks like oil changes and light bulb replacement

31 percent are focused on appearance projects to keep it looking new

22 percent are tackling tune-ups or using performance additives
Only 1 percent are doing body repairs to fix scratches or dents

The biggest challenges young car owners ages 18 to 25 face are:

Keeping it running without having to make or pay for repairs (21%)
Getting better fuel mileage (19%)
Keeping it looking good (16%)
More than 10 percent (11%) said learning how to do maintenance projects themselves

Some young drivers ages 18 to 25 have changed their driving habits in the past two years, with 38 percent driving less to save on gas costs and car wear, 21 percent driving less aggressively and 14 percent driving more cautiously to avoid accidents

When the economy improves, 17 percent of car owners ages 18 to 25 say they would trade their current car for a new one. Nine percent would update the car's performance components or audio electronics

Women Take a Hands-On Approach

Female car owners are just as focused on their cars as assets and keeping them maintained as their male counterparts.

Nearly half (49%) of female car owners depend on their cars for transportation to work or to help them find a job while one-third (36%) say their car is one of their biggest investments. Some 32 percent of female car owners say that have to take better care of their car now because they can't afford a new one.

One-quarter (25%) of female drivers are paying more attention to their car's maintenance than two years ago. Nearly one-third (29%) of women are doing their car maintenance themselves or with a friend or family member. Some 7 percent of these women have just taken over the maintenance after having it professionally done previously.

Of the maintenance projects done by female car owners with their friends or family, the most popular include:

26 percent are doing small maintenance tasks like oil changes and light bulb replacement
26 percent are focused on appearance projects to keep it looking new
14 percent are tackling tune-ups or using performance additives
4 percent are doing body repairs to fix scratches or dents

The biggest challenges female car owners face are:

Keeping it running without having to make or pay for repairs (31%)
Getting better fuel mileage (24%)
Keeping it looking good (9%)
Some 6 percent said learning how to do maintenance projects themselves

Nearly 60 percent (57%) of female drivers are driving differently than they did two years ago. Some 43 percent are focused on driving less to save on gas costs and reduce car wear, 20 percent are driving less aggressively to prevent engine wear and 20 percent are driving more cautiously to avoid accidents and body damage.

When the economy improves, 12 percent of female car owners said they would trade their current car for a new one. Another 12 percent would make the repairs they've been postponing due to the economy, while 7 percent would have professional engine service and 9 percent would opt for detailing.

3M Car Care offers an entire line of consumer car care products, all based on its high-performance professional products, to make it easier for consumers to take care of routine maintenance and car appearance projects. It also offers easy to use kits for tune-ups, headlight restoration and other tasks with all of the products needed for the job in one package. The 3M Car Care product line can be found at leading automotive aftermarket retailers and online at www.Shop3M.com. For more information on 3M Car Care products, visit www.3Mcarcare.com.

This 3M Car Care "Elbow Grease Economics" survey was conducted online within the United States by Harris Interactive via its QuickQuery omnibus on behalf of 3M Car Care between March 27-31, 2009 among 2,014 U.S. adults (aged 18 years and older), 1,835 of which were car owners/lessees. No estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated; a full methodology is available. More than 50 percent (51%) of survey respondents were working full-time or self-employed, and 12% were working part time, while 39 percent of the survey respondents

were unemployed (including retirees, homemakers and those who are disabled and unable to work). Some 9 percent were students.

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