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Fuel crisis calls for alternatives

I’m sure the gradual increase in gas prices over the past few years, as well as the sudden spike in gas prices over just past few months, needs no introduction.

Almost everyone I know complains about the price of gas these days, and I can’t say I blame them. I used to brush off the issue of increased gas prices. My car gets between 31 and 35 miles per gallon and I figured, “Well, I’m not as bad off as most people,” but after paying $3.75 at my last fill up ($3.11 per gallon times 12 gallons), I am starting to feel the pressure.

I am not terribly optimistic on the outlook either. I believe at this point gas prices are a lot like school fees—once they go up, they don’t come back down. This means that we clearly can’t keep going on like we have in the past.

There are two main problems here:

The first, and easiest, problem is that of perception and status. Whether we will admit it, this plays a very significant roll for most in the purchase of an automobile.

People want something stylish that will make them look better in the eyes of others. They want a status symbol.

In for this reason that my dad just bought a V8 Toyota Tundra (which gets 18 mpg) when the 4-cylinder Toyota Tacoma that he got rid of (which got almost 30 mpg) more than suited his needs.

Is also for this reason that many of the rednecks in my hometown would rather chew off their left arm than be caught in anything less than a jacked up, V8 4x4 pickup with 36-inch mud tires.

Don’t laugh too hard yet. The obsession with impractical vehicles is just as rampant in the big city.

Where else can you find someone who pays more per month for his supercharged V8 Mercedes than he does his two-bedroom apartment? Face it, our status symbols mean a lot to us.

How much are these status symbols costing us? Currently if you drive 250 miles a week and you get 18 mpg, you are paying $72 a month more per month than someone who is getting 36 mpg.

If gas ever gets up to $4.50 a gallon, that difference will increase to $108 a month. Is $108 a month worth it? For the average soccer mom and dad trying to keep up with the Joneses next door, probably. For anyone else, who knows? Your mileage may vary—but intended.

The second main problem—one that I believe will be much harder to solve—is one of Americans simply driving too much.

As America becomes more spread out, we have no choice but to travel more. We travel (often long distances) to work, to shop, to travel more. We travel (often long distances) to work, to shop, to travel more.

Carpooling makes sense, but it is not very practical. How often do you run across a situation where between two and five people want to go to the same place at the same time? Aside from the occasional Kroger run or away football game, I can think of too many.

The real problem is that we have a lot of people who need to get a lot of different places on a frequent basis. Carpooling could help in some circumstances but is clearly not the answer.

In the car-buying market I believe there are three basic groups of consumers—those who care about nothing but looks and status, those who care about nothing but economy and the vast percentage of consumers somewhere in the middle that base their purchases on both style and economy.

Just for the record, I think both eyes of the Joneses will always exist. There will always be the rich who could care less about fuel prices and there will always be the poor college student who just wants to get from point A to point B as cheaply as possible.

Where the changes are going to occur, though, is with the mainstream.

A larger and larger percentage of consumers is going to demand more fuel efficient cars. The norm is going to shift....

Jamie Howell
Photography Editor

A larger and larger percentage of consumers are going to demand more fuel efficient cars. The norm is going to shift....
With the widespread use of the Facebook and Google, much of a college student’s personal data is readily available online. Both technologies are great to learn more about current friends or to find out new information about recent acquaintances but should be used sparingly when trying to get to know someone new.

My concern is that people rely too much on the Facebook and Google to make judgments about strangers and that often people evaluate each other based solely on what they read online. For example, a freshman student who is applying to be a member of a student organization. Whether it’s a fraternity or sorority, one of the handful of freshman leadership organizations or any other group where a large number of applicants fill a limited number of openings, chances are that the members of the organization have looked up the biographies of all the new applicants through Facebook and Google.

First impressions are hard to erase, and when a first impression of a person comes from a Facebook page, it can be misleading. Does a list of one’s favorite music, movies, and television shows tell you who he is? Do the books a person reads reflect how smart she is? Is someone with 200 Facebook friends twice as social as someone with 100 friends? Perhaps most detrimental is when intracies of a person’s Search engines are only as good as the information available on websites, and so much about a person isn’t typed up on the internet.

Search engines are geared toward the most recently updated information. That’s why a search for my name returns my Technical articles first. A search result is also geared toward sites that have more of a “web presence.” Sites that garner more traffic from engines generally rank higher on a search results page than those sites that have a limited fan base.

Ten years ago, no one could have predicted the effect that Google has on our lives today. Google is so common that it is becoming part of the vernacular. Have a question? Just google it,” we say. “The same is true for the Facebook, and perhaps the Facebook is spreading even faster than Google did!”

Take as an example the latest book by Tom Wolfe, called How Charlotte Simmons, which takes place at the fictional Dupont University. Even though the book was published in November 2004, it was already out of date when it hit bookstores less than a day after Google did. Even before it was written just before the Facebook craze started.

The book tries to chronicle the ways of college life—from life in the classroom and dorms to parties and college sports—but what’s left out in Wolfe’s book is a student’s constant consultation of other people’s online profile. (On a side note, Wolfe’s book has gotten only mixed reviews, and it fails in many ways other than missing Facebook the book. If you haven’t read it yet, don’t bother. You have better things to do with your time.)

My advice to students is to always be cautious about what information they post on the internet. From your profile on the Facebook to your personal websites and blogs, remember that you never know who will be looking up your personal information online. Your residence on the internet is like a glass house—it’s there for everyone to see. Call me Mr. Obvious, but a good rule of thumb is to only post stuff that you would want your mom or your future employer to see.

The quandary, then, for opponents of science and rational thought, is how to infiltrate a system from which they have been ejected. The answer appears straight out of Homer’s Odyssey. While creationism is far too overtly religious to be widely accepted in the public school system, creationism without any mention of God and propagated by institutions and individuals pretending to be members of the scientific community can serve as a sort of Trojan horse for fundamentalist religious activists. A faux “theory” of evolution will be subtler and more difficult to see. Stay away from pictures where you are participating in illegal activities, like drug use or under-aged drinking, vandalism, or burglary. Also, make sure you are properly clothed in your pictures.

So congratulations, you have read my entire editorial. Now you may go back to your Facebook.

**Cash money records**

While we did not reach our goal of raising $150,000 for Katrina relief, $45,000 is pretty darn close. The Tech community has continued to support our efforts very strongly in goals where charity is concerned. We put our money where our hearts are, and so falling short of a $50,000 goal by $5,000 is still quite admirable.

**Belligerent drunks**

Last Friday night, five to six drunken males damaged approximately thirty student-made models at the architecture building. The perpetrators were driven out and police are investigating the incident. However, the real question was if a bunch of drunkards would go to the architecture building on a Friday night?

**Online information often misleads viewer**

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Proving innocence in face of FBI phone taps

The FBI has announced that sometimes it accidentally listens to the wrong conversation over tapped telephone lines under the Patriot Act. While information gathered cannot be used against you per se, it is possible information you give over the phone may be used for further investigations of you.

For this reason, to prove I’m an honest citizen, I have written below transcripts of the past five telephone conversations I have had. The boring parts have been taken out. The rest remains intact:

**Retail store, 10/2/05, 2:13p.m.**
Me: Hello?
Clerk: Hi!
Me: What’s your return policy?
Clerk: What? Me: Your return policy? Clerk: What’s a—? Me: I bought this jacket last week, but it’s too big. Can I return it if I have the receipt?
Clerk: Yeah?
Me: Thanks.
Clerk: [click]
Pharmacy, 10/2/05, 4:15p.m.
Recording: Thank you for calling the pharmacy. If you wish to refill a prescription, please press 1. If you are a doctor, please press 9.
Me: If you would like to pick up your prescription at 4 o’clock, press four, zero, zero, then press the pound key.
Clerk: Yeah?
Me: [press 1]
Recording: Please enter the six digit code located on the left corner of your prescription, then press the pound key.
Me: [skilled button pushing]

**Recording:** If you would like to pick up your prescription today, press 1. Tomorrow, press 2.
Then, my favorite part:
**Recording:** Enter the time you would like to pick up your prescription. For example, if you would like to pick up your prescription at 4 o’clock, press four, zero, zero, then press the pound key.

The high point of the conversation is when I press “1” for “a.m.” and “2” for “p.m.” which is even cooler.

**Younger sibling, 10/3/05, 1:11a.m.**
Me: I said I’d be up around 2am...
Sibling: I have the receipt?
Me: Ok.
Sibling: Oh, ok. Let’s talk tomorrow. How’s that?
Me: Ok.
I don’t remember actually hanging up the phone. I think I fell asleep immediately.

**Extended Family, 10/1/05**
Me: Ok, hi mom. How was Cousin Lenny’s wedding?
Mom: It was great. The reception was very nice. We weren’t a Frank Lloyd Wright tourist. Me: That sounds neat. I didn’t know there were Frank Lloyd Wright houses in Buffalo.
Mom: Me neither. It was very nice. Would you like to talk to your Aunt Maggie?
Me: Ok.

**If I’m guilty of anything, it’s preferring to talk to actual people. I also occasionally curse at recorded voices.”**

Alexandra Pajak
Columnist

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*Science from page 7*

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Pharmacy, 10/2/05, 4:15p.m.
Recording: Thank you for calling the pharmacy. If you wish to refill a prescription, please press 1. If you are a doctor, please press 9.
Me: If you would like to pick up your prescription at 4 o’clock, press four, zero, zero, then press the pound key.
Clerk: Yeah?
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Mom: Me neither. It was very nice. Would you like to talk to your Aunt Maggie?
Me: Ok.

Aunt Maggie: I’ve never used a cell phone before, so I’m giving it back to your mother.
Me: Ok.
Aunt Maggie: Bye! Me: Bye, Aunt Maggie. Mom: Would you like to talk to your Uncle Frank?
Me: Ok.
Uncle Frank: Hello! Me: Hi, Uncle Frank.
Uncle Frank: How’s it going? Me: Pretty good. How are you? Uncle Frank: Pretty good. Well, take it easy!
Me: Ok.

Telemarketer, Everyday, Dinner time
Me: Hello?
Telemarketer: Hello, is this Alexandria… Pajak?
Me: [click]

If I’m guilty of anything, it’s preferring to talk to actual people. I also occasionally curse at recorded voices. I sometimes mistake a recorded voice for an actual one. Kafka, you were right all along. And you, too, Jerry Seinfeld.

So there’s my proof I’m a good citizen. And if any FBI agents are reading this and are still interested in tapping my calls, could you please send David Duchovny to investigate? I know that is SO 1990s and only one step down from a total Trekki.

But if I’m going to have my wires tapped, it’s worth trying to have some fun with it.

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