

I Knew the Price of Gas Was Too Low When . . .

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With practically everyone lamenting how the price of gasoline seems to be permanently lodged above \$3 a gallon, my contrarian nature has begun to surface at all points of my days.

I knew the price of gas was too low when I recently came out of a mall to find my small car wedged in between two monstrous SUVs -- a Hummer H1 and a Cadillac Escalade -- and I couldn't back out of my parking space without risking life and limb. There was no way I could tell if cars were coming in either direction. I had to think that such monster cars were causing an untold number of parking lot fender benders and were, hence, driving up the price of automobile insurance for everyone. If the price of gas went even higher, then surely parking lot accidents would be reduced, given that fewer monster SUVs would be bought -- and people's automobile insurance premiums would be lower, albeit marginally.

I knew the price of gas was too low when I left Wal-Mart on a sweltering day and saw a driver with her clunker parked close to the Wal-Mart entrance. Her eight-cylinder rattletrap was, of course, idling. Why? To keep the car's air conditioning going. If the price of gas were higher, the woman might have cut off her engine and walked the fifty feet to the store's entrance to bask in the store's air conditioning. She would then not have been contributing to the country's pollution and oil import problems.

I knew the price of gas was too low when I went grocery shopping only to find an obviously hip teenager blasting his rap music from what must have been a 500-watt car stereo system, with base speakers that were jarring to distraction all other shoppers. Of course, he also

had his car idling. Why? He would have quickly drained his battery had he not used his low-riding car as an electric generator for his car stereo. Had the price of gas been higher, the hipster might not have been able to afford the car stereo system that he was using to assault the eardrums of everyone around him.

I knew the price of gas was too low when I found the price of ketchup selling for more than the price of a gallon of gasoline. I knew right then that the country was not only facing an “energy crisis.” It was also facing an even more serious “ketchup crisis.” Perhaps, if the price of gas were higher, more people would consume gas with the same care they consume an array of other products.

I knew the price of gas was too low when my high-school-age daughter, who has to buy her own gas, refused to make any effort at all to carpool her way to school this past year, even though one of her classmates drives to school within a hundred feet of our house. Obviously, the price of gas is so low that even teenagers are not willing to inconvenience themselves in the least. But then, it could be that high schoolers drive to school as their way of gaining stature by flaunting their ability to waste scarce energy reserves.

I knew the price of gas was too low when I tried to drive the 45 miles from home to LAX, and the I- 405 looked like a parking lot. And the trip took two hours! I am sure everyone on the road did as I did, looked off into the distance and observed the strip of brown haze over Los Angeles, lamenting to themselves that they would soon be coating the inside of their lungs with that gunk. Nevertheless, with the price of gas as low as it is, they all kept driving, understandably. If the price of gas were higher, perhaps people would move closer to work and do a multitude of other things that would curb the LA area’s pollution problems.

I knew the price of gas was too low when I heard a television news report that is repeated every time the price of gas jumps upward. As if scripted, the reporter goes up to a driver of one of the many humongous SUVs who is filling his tank at a service station, only to ask the most banal of questions, “What do you think of the high price of gas?” The driver invariably says something to the effect, “Gee, I am devastated. I can’t afford to drive to work or take my kids to school.” If the price of gas were higher, maybe such drivers would think a bit more carefully about the consequences of the size cars they buy.

I also knew the price of gas was too low when I observed neighbors driving the .8 mile to the gym, to do what? To walk on the treadmill, naturally.

Finally, I knew the price of gas was too low when I saw a bumper sticker on the back of an eight-cylinder Chevy Suburban that read “Global Warming Is Your Fault!” Gee!

Perhaps a higher price of gas would force people to do what they all want everyone else to do, conserve the world’s scarce oil reserves and, if only coincidentally, treat the planet with greater care.