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Gas prices jumped right past \$3 last year without warning and could do so again anytime. With so many great fuel-singy cars out there, why take a chance? Below are the ten 2006 cars whose mileage numbers will best protect you from a pinch. Note that this is EPA's estimated mileage, which comes with the fine print of "results may vary" thanks to its archaic testing procedures. Still, the tests are consistent from car to car, so the finishing order of the cars can be expected to hold up in the real world, even if the exact numbers don't.

City Freeway Average

1. Honda Insight 60 66 63
2. Toyota Prius automatic 60 51 55.5
3. Honda Civic Hybrid 49 51 50
4. Volkswagen Beetle TDI 37 44 40.5
5. Volkswagen Golf TDI 37 44 40.5
6. Volkswagen Jetta TDI 36 41 38.5
7. Toyota Corolla 32 41 36.5
8. Scion xA 32 37 34.5
9. Honda Civic automatic 30 40 35
10. Kia Rio / Hyundai Accent 32 35 33.5

(The Rio and Accent are the same car.) Except for the Prius and two Civics, all figures are for cars with manual transmissions, which by nature of their more efficient design tend to squeeze out 1-2 extra MPG. But even with an automatics-only rule, the same ten models still comprise the list in only a slightly altered order "no surprise there.

Hybrids of course take the top three spots, largely thanks to the ability to turn off their engines. Other reasons include shrunk engines, improved aerodynamic tricks, and harder tires. Don't think that mileage comes for free; hybrids cost a couple thousand more at the outset. Diesel-powered cars occupy the next three spots, though not everyone is comfortable with the technology (mostly due to outdated generalizations of 1980s diesels) or having to find gas stations that carry the fuel.

For those who prefer to tread in familiar waters, let's hack off the top six entries and redo the list. This time, just normal gas-powered cars:

City Freeway Average

1. Toyota Corolla 32 41 36.5
2. Honda Civic automatic 30 40 35

3. Scion xA 32 37 34.5
4. Kia Rio / Hyundai Accent 32 35 33.5
5. Toyota Matrix / Pontiac Vibe 30 36 33
6. Scion xB 30 34 32
7. Mini Cooper 28 36 32
8. Nissan Sentra 1.8L (tie) 28 35 31.5
- Mazda 3 2.0L (tie) 28 35 31.5
10. Mitsubishi Lancer (tie) 27 34 30.5
- Hyundai Elantra (tie) 27 34 30.5
- Chevrolet Aveo (tie) 26 35 30.5
- Acura RSX (tie) 27 34 30.5

Yes, there are plenty of cars that get an [EPA estimated] 30 MPG on average, and it's a pleasant surprise that perennial favorites Corolla and Civic lead the pack. Presence of the Mini Cooper and Acura RSX serve as proof that mileage need not come at the cost of fun or performance.

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