

5th Gear

All we motorists seem to do is pay, pay, pay. But there is one bit of good news in this otherwise gloomy outlook and that's the government's stance on LPG. This fuel could save you a bundle. For example, Quentin filled up his very own LPG-fuelled Jeep Cherokee with 45 litres of liquid gas. If this had been unleaded it would have cost him £35 but with LPG the bill was just £17. Yes, you think, that's all well and good but you'll never be able to find somewhere to fill up with the stuff. Not so. There are currently around 1100 LPG stations in the UK and for the past two years they've been expanding at a rate of around one new one every day. Plus, an LPG converted car can still revert to petrol power if need be, simply by flicking a dashboard switch. But in the six months that he's been running his Jeep on gas Quentin has only had to go back to unleaded twice because he couldn't find somewhere that sold LPG. So you're interested now? Well, converting your car to LPG cost on average about £1500 and involves installing a new additional fuel tank under the floor so it won't eat into luggage space. Best thing is, if your car is under five years old and the LPG conversion is proven to reduce emissions you could be liable to receive up to 70% of the cost of the modifications back from the government. Now there have been tales of horror about converters making a right mess of the work and cars that haven't never been the same since. But the government run Powershift organisation has a list of around 100 approved contractors who will carry out the work to a high standard and give a full warranty on it. Stick with one of these places and you shouldn't go wrong. There shouldn't even be much of a performance drop-off with LPG. Quentin has found his Cherokee runs just as well on the stuff and even our very own tame racing driver Mr. Needell has acknowledged that gas is the way forward. He's not alone either because several local authorities, Yorkshire constabulary and even the Royal family all run LPG fleets. There's another LPG benefit too - cars running on the stuff chuck out less muck than petrol or diesel powered equivalents. It's for this very reason that the government has promised not to raise duty on LPG until 2004 and vowed that as long as LPG remains cleaner than other fuels it will be taxed at a lower level. Okay, so it's not all good news. You can't take an LPG powered vehicle on the Channel Tunnel for one thing. And if you drive a small car over relatively low mileages then the benefits are slim. Plus not everything qualifies for one of those tempted treasury rebates on the conversion costs. But if you run something big and thirsty and you drive long distances you really can afford not to switch to LPG. Find out more about approved converters and government grants:

www.est-powershift.org.uk