

Pump Pointers

Gas-saving tips from the pros

I asked a handful of Walmart FLW Tour pros how the price of unleaded fuel had changed their practice strategies and what they did to get around it. Here's a summary of their solutions:

Whenever possible, trailer to a boat ramp located in close proximity to the area of the lake where you'll practice that day. The theory is a tow vehicle is generally more fuel-efficient than an outboard.

On extremely large lakes like Erie, where long boat rides in excess of 40 to 50 miles are the norm, some pros will change lodging locations multiple times during the designated practice session to avoid having to trailer or run their boats long distances to explore new waters.

Rid the boat of any unnecessary weight by removing extra tackle or gear, and try to store any heavy stuff toward the rear of the boat. By lightening the load and distributing the weight more properly, the outboard won't have to work as hard to lift the boat, thus improving fuel economy.

Don't speed. Outboards are generally much more fuel-efficient at midrange speeds than when the throttle is wide open.

Land O'Lakes walleye pro Eric Olson of Red Wing, Minn., agreed those are all viable options for getting more value at the pump, but said there are a host of other things anglers can do to get the most bang for their buck in terms of fuel economy.

As part of Evinrude's marketing and platform development department, Olson frequently makes one-way runs of 60 miles



or more into big water with no place to replenish his fuel cells for the return trip. In other words, Olson knows how to milk the most distance out of a gallon of gas.

The outboard-performance expert offered the following tips to help anglers maximize fuel economy:

Jack Plate: Think of the jack plate as a cheater bar one might use to aid in lifting a heavy object. The plate sets the motor up and away from the transom to provide the motor more leverage to lift the bow with less trim angle. A better-lifted bow reduces the amount of drag caused by the hull being in the water, also known as a wetted hull.

"The less wetted hull, the better fuel economy you'll get, provided the prop is pointing directly in the direction of travel," Olson said.

A hydraulic jack plate makes it possible to tweak performance even once the boat is up and running by allowing one to raise or lower the motor for optimum hydrodynamic efficiency.

Quick-Release Trolling-Motor Bracket: Olson added a quick-release trolling-motor bracket to his Minn Kota trolling motor so he can remove the extra weight from his bow before making a long run.

"Removing the weight from the front of the boat makes it easier for the outboard motor to raise the bow and reduces wind resistance, which, in turn, improves fuel economy about one-third of a mile per gallon," Olson said. "Plus, it gives me a speed gain of about 2 to 3 mph."

He secures the trolling motor to the floor of his boat using ropes or ratchet straps.

Propeller Selection and Maintenance: The prop is the all-important piece that transfers horsepower to the water. Selecting a prop with the right pitch, rake, diameter and cup is essential to maximizing performance and fuel economy.

The most efficient prop can vary immensely from one boat to the next. The prop that provides the best fuel economy on long-range runs may not be the best choice for achieving top speeds.

"I always encourage guys to play with props until they find the one that gives them the end result they are after," Olson said. "Once you find the right prop, your fuel economy could improve as much as 20 percent, depending on the hull and load."

It's equally important to keep the prop in tip-top shape. Burrs, dings and bends on a prop blade will hamper performance and reduce fuel economy.

Gauge Technology: Olson relies heavily on Evinrude I-Command multi-function gauge technology. Through the I-Command, he's able to keep a close check on trim angle, revolutions per minute, speed, fuel flow and other critical engine-performance information to help him maximize his fuel economy as he travels from point A to point B.

"By closely monitoring the information as I burn off fuel, I can instantaneously determine the best trim angle, rpm, etc., that will give me the best possible fuel economy throughout the day," Olson said.