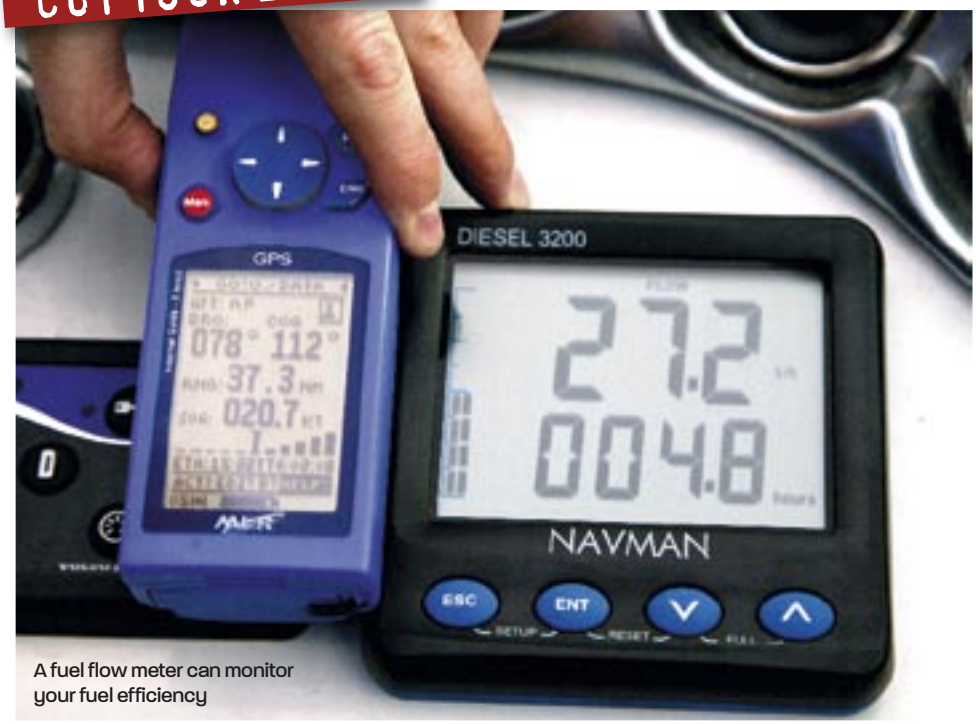
CUT YOUR BILLS



A fuel flow meter can monitor your fuel efficiency

Practical magic

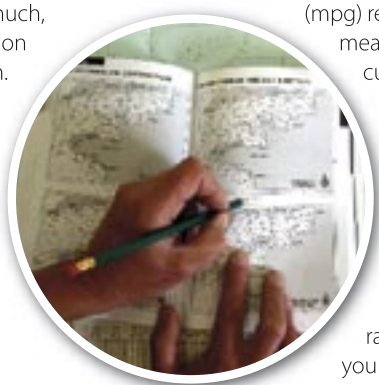
What can you do to offset rising fuel costs?

Let's say you want to keep your existing boat. You don't want to move it abroad and you don't fancy setting up your own biofuel refinery. How can you offset the effects of rocketing fuel prices?

If you can't face being boatless but can't stomach the thought of fuel bills up to twice what they currently are, you will need to use your boat cleverly to reduce the impact. You could simply use your boat half as much, but this isn't so much as solution as the essence of the problem. However, fear not, there are ways of reducing your fuel usage while impacting less on your boating.

First and foremost you should run your boat at its optimum speed. If we take a boat fitted with twin 350hp Volvo D6s, and we run that boat at full throttle, it will be burning 140 litres per hour (lph). Now we know that few owners will run at wide open throttle, so assuming a cruise of 3000rpm, you will burn 90lph producing 341hp.

If you now reduce that by a further 500rpm you can save 36lph, using just 54lph but still producing 305hp. Obviously you will need to do the calculations as using less fuel per hour has to be offset by the extra time it will take to get to your destination due to the slower speed, but on many boats you can reduce revs without losing too much speed and there are savings to be had.


Plan your journey to make use of the tides

Fit a fuel flow meter

The best way of monitoring this will be to fit a fuel flow meter. If the meter accepts speed input from the GPS it may give you a miles per gallon (mpg) reading, which is the best measure of how efficient your current throttle setting is. I have tried this with a petrol boat and found that the fuel saving can be considerable.

We could also learn a thing or two from the yachties. Try planning your passage to make the best use of the tides. Three knots of tide with you, rather than against you, gives you an extra six knots over the ground. So you'll need less hp to maintain cruising speed and, therefore use less fuel. Anchoring overnight instead of marina hopping won't save fuel, but £40 a night over a three-night weekend will save enough to pay for 120lt of the stuff.

Planing hulled motorboats are particularly sensitive to drag and weight. A clean bottom will reduce drag and greatly improve fuel efficiency. You should also consider removing any excess weight from your boat. Do you really need 200m of anchor chain? Leave your tender and outboard on your home berth if you are not planning on using it, as weight on the aft end means more power is needed to plane. Do you need to carry full tanks of water with you on passage? If you are heading to another marina, dump most of it, keeping just enough for tea and other emergencies, and fill up when you get there – 500lt of water equates to half a ton of weight.

If you can't lose weight, consider redistributing it on the boat. If you need to use trim tabs to get up and maintain a planing attitude, you are creating extra drag and are using more fuel than necessary. Take some weight aft and place it forward to balance the boat better, so that trim tabs aren't required.

Lastly, don't use the boat less, just use the engines less. You can still spend a weekend aboard visiting your favourite destinations but perhaps spend longer in port enjoying the local hospitality, rather than dashing from one place to the next. A weekend visiting two ports can be even more enjoyable than visiting three, if you spend time at the destination rather than on passage.


Anchoring overnight will save money on marina fees

MBM verdict

You won't save a fortune here, but subtle changes to your boating could reap financial rewards that make the effort worthwhile.