

It seems so simple. Just fill up the tank, kick the tires, toss all your gear into the trunk and hit the road. Hey, its a lot easier than standing in long airport lines, dragging suitcases onto moving belts, taking off your shoes, being felt up by security geeks and then squeezed for hours inside a flying sardine can.

So, how do you make driving more comfy than flying? Let me count the ways.

1. Before you hit the road, do a complete car check-up. If an oil change is due within a couple of months, get it before your trip. Make sure the tires are shape for a long drive, aligned and with good treads. Check the brakes, belts, hoses and filters. Unless you enjoy summer sweating, make sure the air conditioning is in top shape. Keep an emergency kit in the trunk and make sure each passenger is trained in its use.



2. If you're too stubborn to want to fool with one of those newfangled GPS gizmos, you're too old to drive these days. You'd rather try to fold unreadable maps, get lost in the middle of the night, and into the usual front-seat arguments, such as "Why didn't you ask at the last gas station?"

If the car you'll be driving for many days this summer doesn't have a GPS already installed, get one before you venture out into the unknown. Originally priced at about \$400 when they were a new novelty about five years ago, you can now get a good one at from about \$50 to \$100, and it is well worth it.

3. Before you hit the road on an all-day, all-night or longer trip, decide on the duty schedule. The best is when each person takes turns of two hours on and two hours riding shotgun or snoozing. If there are more people to get into the driving schedule, so much the better for everyone.

4. Don't overload your car with unnecessary stuff. Before you leave home, pile everything you'll absolutely need in one place: clothing, shoes, food, water, DVDs, etc. Then, take only 50% of the stuff. If there are only two of you on the trip, keep the back seat free for the alternate driver to stretch out and nap. Put everything possible into the trunk, and whatever you do, don't obstruct any of the car windows with junk.

5. If it will be a long, long, many-day drive, set up your nightly stop plans in advance. Get on the

internet and select hotels/motels, b&bs and make reservations. That way you'll be sure of rooms and won't have to spend any nights sleeping in your car at a truck stop.

6. If your car is loaded down with squeezed-in people, especially if some are kids, when changing drivers on the two-hour shifts, stop at a big gas and eat stop. While filling up the tank, people can wander, do potty needs, stretch legs and eat. If there are young, young kids and old, old great grandmom in the car, plan for more frequent stops.

7. No matter what age the passengers are, take along all kinds of entertainment. These days, it includes DVD players and discs, radios, cell phones with video and all kinds of electronic marvels. And, by the way, don't forget those old whatchamacallits: books, magazines, playing cards and kid games. You may even try what we did on our family trip in our 1937 Hudson: count cows and Model A Fords.

8. Although gas prices in 2009 are not quite the oil baron robberies of 2008, you may want to consider a closer, less expensive journey. Is it worth all the hassle of spending four days on the road each way just to visit grandma across 12 states? Or choose a national park just three hours away from home, and later buy air tickets for grandma to visit you next Thanksgiving?