

# VILLAGE VIEW

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Is it possible there's a car that gets 90 miles to the gallon? Is it possible that somewhere in Detroit, a specially built, finely tuned, uniquely equipped and beautifully engineered automobile is being kept under wraps for that very reason?

This, I'm told, is the sort of apocryphal story that regularly surfaces, makes the rounds, and then submerges again as other stories come to the fore.

The car (so goes the story) is always discovered to get phenomenal gas mileage when it is purchased, new, by someone who is a nameless acquaintance of someone's friend or relative.

This unidentified individual trades in his older model on a new car which he then drives from one city to another; upon arriving at his destination he notices his gas gauge indicates his tank is still three-quarters full. Believing the gauge to be faulty, he pulls into a station and discovers the tank is still practically full.

Back home again, he checks with his dealer who, it develops, has been frantically trying to reach him in his absence.

Within the hour he receives a call from one of the big three automakers and is offered a large sum of money for his car; he refuses the offer, of course, intending to keep the fantastic machine for the rest of his life.

At this point, however, the details of the story vary. In some instances he takes the car in for service and when he picks it up he discovers the car no longer delivers superior mileage. It's the same car, carries the same vehicle identification number, bears exactly the same tiny imperfection (no new car is ever delivered without some small defect in paint or metal), and the only discernable difference is that it burns gas as thirstily as all similar models.

Sometimes the story goes that the car is repossessed "in error" and returned with profuse apologies. Another version tells of the car being stolen, later recovered unharmed, and returned to the owner. In every case, once the owner gets it back, the car is no longer the souped-up special initially delivered.

A story closely resembling this has circulated recently; to give it greater credence, a Boston radio station talk-show interviewed a man who claimed to have invented a remarkable spark plug that so greatly improves efficiency in the gasoline engine that cars, equipped with his plugs, could deliver such mileage.

According to the interviewee, the spark plug has been patented in many countries including the United States, but no one will purchase it. The automobile makers of Detroit not only reject it, but after examination and testing, have threatened to prevent the plug's marketing.

How is that possible? The man who says he invented the plugs says he has been told that if he attempts to produce it, the car magnates will copy it which will force him to sue to protect his patents, and the auto manufacturers will file countersuits and tie up production, legally, for decades. The man, who asserts the American public is being "had", believes those stories about getting 90 miles to the gallon.

It's his conviction that a few of those cars slip past the inspectors while equipped with special spark plugs like those he has designed. He thinks Detroit and the oil barons are in cahoots, that there's no reason in the world we couldn't all be driving cars delivering 90 MPG.

He reports Saudi Arabians have offered tempting amounts of money for his invention, but that he has declined to sell his patents because the Saudi's will not agree to produce the plugs. They want only to acquire the rights so they can bury them in the Sahara.

The question is, "What is the truth?"

If you're a cynic, it's believable that a conspiracy between automobile and oil magnates exists to keep the price of oil and gasoline high and to drive it higher. It's conceivable our whole economy is manipulated by powerful business interests whose sole concern is their own wealth and position. It's not stretching the imagination much to believe there are powerful lobbyists capable of exerting enough influence on legislators to maintain these manipulations and machinations. I can believe it.

When we read there's gasoline available to important government employees at 67 cents a gallon instead of the 90 cents a gallon we are paying, I can believe it.

When we read a yacht is brought from Florida to Harwich at a cost in fuel of more than \$2,000, I can believe it.

When we read that if you're the Speaker of the House you can operate your limosine at a cost to the taxpayer of thousands of dollars a year, I can believe it.

If there were actually a national emergency in the area of fuel supplies, wouldn't you suppose recreational uses would be curtailed? Would influential members of the government be able to get fuel more cheaply than the rest of us? Wouldn't government people be making some effort to conserve and set an example for the general public?

On the other hand, if you had invented a gadget that could produce 90 miles to the gallon of gasoline, wouldn't you have it installed on your car? Wouldn't you be out there demonstrating that it does work?

Even if GM or Ford or Chrysler threatened to put you out of business, wouldn't you find some way to bring that gadget to the market, if only to force production somehow?

Wouldn't you be negotiating with the Japanese, the people who are producing all those great little cars that are getting 30 and 40 miles to the gallon? Or with Volkswagon? Or with Fiat?

And if you bought a car that gave you 90 miles to the gallon, would you casually drop it off at the dealer's for an oil change? Would you let it out of your sight before you had it publicly tested? Just imagine what tremendous publicity the media would give such performance if you could demonstrate your car actually delivered that kind of mileage.

What do you believe? Who do you believe? Is the self-described inventor nothing but a liar? Are the big corporations pulling the wool over our eyes to milk every dollar they can from the American public? Who knows the truth? What is the truth?