

VILLAGE VIEW

ANDREA LEONARD

Did you participate in the effort to conserve gasoline this summer? Many Americans did; enough of us to affect measurably the statistics on the quantity of gasoline sold. There's been a decrease of around 8% compared with the same period in 1978. Let's hope it becomes a habit with us all.

Considering the number of automobiles on the Cape this past season, and assuming our part of the country isn't terribly different from the rest of the nation, the reduction is almost surprising. With the exception of the month of June when the gas shortage was most acute, there was little visible difference in the amount of traffic, there was the usual paucity of parking spaces at the more popular shopping districts, and our recreation areas attracted the usual number of visitors.

How, then, could there have been an 8% drop in the quantity of fuel used? Wouldn't it be helpful to know the reasons behind the savings?

How about you? Was sitting in a line of cars waiting to fill your tank reason to use less fuel? Were price increases a factor? Does the knowledge we're dependent on imports from foreign countries for a large share of our oil supply make you feel uneasy and less inclined to drive your car for pleasure? Are the social and political instabilities in the Middle East enough of a threat that you feel the situation may have a personal effect on you as an individual?

Or are you responding to the patriotic call to lower your driving speeds, walk short distances instead of using your car, ride a bicycle when possible, join a car pool, do several errands on one trip when you do drive, or any combination of the above?

Certainly we saw, this summer, more bicycles and mopeds on the roads than ever before. There were more people walking as well as more people jogging. Everywhere we go, we see the smaller cars replacing the gas guzzlers.

Roller skating is suddenly a popular sport across the country. Aside from the safety factor in heavily trafficked parts of town, roller skating is a fine idea. It's good exercise, fast, convenient, and offers a distinct advantage over larger wheeled vehicles: you can slip the skates off and resume walking without worrying where to park. Your wheels store neatly in a small space or can be slung over your shoulder.

And there were other, some quite unusual modes of transportation seen hereabout. One ingenious experimenter with alternate energy had rigged a wheeled chassis with mast and sail. I watched him sailing the vehicle in circles around the parking lot at Craigville one morning before the tourists were flocking onto the beach.

It was also startling to view a man on short skis mounted on roller skates schussing along Main Street.

Doubtless there've been numerous other similar inventions; those are the ones I happened to see. It's good to know people are thinking about ways to move themselves from one place to another without burning gasoline and that at least some people are enthusiastic enough to try putting their ideas

That's how Henry Ford got started. That's how Robert Fulton developed the steam engine. That's how we'll eventually work our way out of the bind we've gotten into, allowing ourselves to be dependent on foreign oil.

It's a trend calling for rejoicing and thanksgiving. At least people are realizing the federal government isn't going to go out and save us. Maybe it can't, but it's clear it won't. Perhaps a new day is dawning when people will begin to look within themselves instead of to Uncle Sam for all the answers.

One thing's certain: with all the education provided and available to American youth, with all the latent talent we and they know exists, and with all the problems awaiting solution, there's plenty of opportunity for innovation, there's a ready market for workable products, and those people with ideas that succeed could reap some pretty fantastic profits.

Still, I'm wondering, what's the explanation for the decrease in gasoline consumption; the statistics speak for themselves; fact is fact. But it seems to me that knowing the reasons behind the facts is just as important as the fact itself.

All of us must answer for ourselves, of course, and the answers could be different for each of us. Long lines at gas pumps do nothing to encourage me to reduce the miles I drive; the lines are an inconvenience I can avoid by changing the time I go in for a fill.

The price increase is but one more in a long long list of price increases, no easier and no harder to adjust to than higher prices for bread, coffee or hamburger. A certain amount of fuel is a necessity if I'm to get to work and back; there's no alternative transportation. I must have gas, as I must have food.

Dependency on foreign oil makes me nervous. If there's something I can do in concert with other Americans to reduce (and eventually eliminate) such dependency, I'll do my part. I'll drive a small car, the smallest and lightest available that keeps me warm and dry in all weathers. I'll even pay more for it, initially, and realize the savings in operating costs over the years I own it.

When practical, I'll walk or ride a bicycle; instead of running to Hyannis half-a-dozen times a week, I'll plan all my errands for a single trip. Some weeks I won't go there at all. There'll be days, and even entire weekends, when the car will not stir from the garage.

The decrease in gasoline consumption proves many of us, for whatever reasons, are feeling pressure to drive fewer miles and less often. When there's no urgent need to go, we sit tight.

As winter comes on, heating fuel prices will be much higher than last year; it's harder to conserve heating fuel than gasoline. For the same reasons people have reduced gasoline consumption, however, we'll reduce demand for heating fuels. People are insulating older homes and beefing up the insulation in newer ones.

People are buying storm sash for windows and doors; they're caulking to tighten up air leaks; they're installing window shades to be drawn at night to reduce heat loss; they're trimming tree branches on the south side of the house to let in the sun during daylight hours; they're installing solar hot water heating systems to eliminate the second-largest fuel burner in the average home; they're setting up woodstoves to supplement conventional burners.

Will it make a difference? Of course it will. The price of a unit of gas or gallon of oil isn't going to come down, but the total dollars spent for heat will be reduced by using the heat most efficiently.

Is it possible to become independent of conventional heating fuels? Approximately 30,000 solar-heated buildings are proving today it's not only possible but practical, especially if you're starting a new house and planning to use the sun's available energy.

Is it worth it? Well, which foreign nation do you want to depend upon for an uninterrupted supply of oil?