



Talk of gas rationing keeps cropping up and, if you do much traveling on the highways, it's easy to see why.

Most drivers try to maintain speed limits to conserve fuel. Traffic is thinner than in summer months, of course, but it's difficult to tell if it's only seasonal or if people are making only necessary trips.

What makes you and me, all those doing their best to save, feel gas rationing might be a good thing is drivers who aren't doing their part.

There are three outstanding groups in this category.

One group is the small-car drivers. In many cases they actually get more efficient operation at 60 MPH than they do at 50, and have a pretty good case for cruising at higher speeds.

The second is the young male driver of either a standard-sized American car, complete with "lifters" and noisy exhaust, or a pickup truck. These pass other cars and disappear over a distant hill, probably traveling at 60 or 65.

The third bunch really makes me feel angry. These drive big gas-guzzling road-monsters, most carrying "vanity" plates with low numbers or initials instead of standard license plates.

Apparently these are the "haves" who not only care little about their less affluent fellow-citizens, but don't care if the rest of us know they feel superior and above the law.

They ignore speed limits and flash past cars traveling at moderate speed, showing a high-and-mighty disregard for everyone.

Somehow they manage to see themselves especially privileged and not subject to the same regulations as other Americans.

We can accept a small four-cylinder engine, designed to operate economically and efficiently at 60, justifiably being driven at that optimum speed.

I can accept with some understanding youth's impatience, knowing if I were twenty years old I'd probably be inching up on the limit myself. My memory is good.

What's hard to accept is that those our economy has helped most, evidenced by their capability to own cars representing large investments of cash and by low-number license plates indicating they may have some political pull, flaunting their indifference to law-abiding citizens.

What happens when you're driving along at 50 on a broad divided highway, staying in line, keeping a good distance between yourself and the car ahead, holding speed down and feeling virtuous -- and suddenly, one of those luxury cars Detroit turns out comes boiling past you?

The urge to swing out and keep pace is almost irresistible.

The competitive spirit has been nurtured in

the American public. It starts at home when a child begins school and continues throughout life. Achievement in school is measured by grades: the higher the grade, the more praiseworthy the child.

It's reinforced in sports: the higher the score, the better the team. It's the American way to measure an individual's value by his material achievement, the quality of his clothing, the size of his car, the location and pretentiousness of his home.

All of us are influenced by pressures to achieve, to win, to acquire, to overwhelm one another with bigger, better, faster, newer, fancier things or activities.

No matter if you're boy or girl, man or woman, you feel the pressure to "get ahead".

On the road, when the power to surpass or keep up with the other guy lies under the toe of the shoe on your right foot, it takes a lot of resistance to let another driver go on ahead and leave you behind.

There's not a thing to stop you, of course; you know your car will hit 60 or 70. All you have to do is give it a little more gas and away you'll go.

Somehow it's galling to control the impulse when that other driver shows you his heels. His disdain for the speed limit translates into disdain for you and the other good folk on the road trying their best to save fuel.

What are our choices?

Well, you can pull out into the left lane, stomp on your accelerator, increase your gas consumption by 25% and satisfy your urge to keep up with the other guy.

Alternatively, you can stay in line and let the selfish inconsiderate driver of the other car go on about his business. You can hope a policeman will haul him over.

You can do what's right, no matter what the other person does. Remember when we were children? We said to our parents "The other kids are doing it," and our folks replied, "If the other kids were jumping off the bridge, would you do it, too?"

There's one more thing we can do. Show our approval of those doing their best to conserve fuel. Show them polite consideration on the road. Support each other by increasing efforts to keep down speed.

Show disapproval of those ignoring the law by refusing to be drawn into their game. The more drivers sticking to the limit, the more visible the lawbreakers become and the better chance they'll be caught.

As more and more drivers become accustomed to slower speed, those who've not yet accepted it will feel more and more out of step.

Can this technique actually do any good? Sure it can. Just as we're programmed to compete, we're also programmed to conform. Consider clothing and hair-styles, for example. In every type of activity, we, as people, are conformists.

Granted, it would help if those who should be leaders were setting the example instead of the ones for whom the example must be set.

This, however, doesn't seem to be the situation; therefore it's up to the Common Man to show up those who should know better, but don't. The most effective way is making them conscious of their anti-social behavior -- the unpopular and visible minority.

It's a responsibility of the more fortunate to set the pace, but if they ignore that responsibility, it can be brought to their attention. Even the affluent and powerful are subject to guilt feelings when their unacceptable behavior is made obvious.

Let's try it and see if this psychology doesn't work; if it doesn't, then let's have strict gas rationing!.