

The Road to Ruin

MOTORING IS BECOMING something of a nightmare these days as the cost of simply getting around – to and from work, shopping, school lifts, visiting friends, sports events, a night at the movies and so on – climbs inexorably. Fuel alone has risen more than 30% this year, in spite of a strong currency which does to some extent allay the impact of crude oil at US\$112 a barrel. For the first time, we now have a double digit price for fuel.

Although public transport is slowly improving, our urban sprawl militates against travelling by any other method than by our own wheels. The proposed tolling initiatives, particularly those in and around Gauteng, have already created a public outcry.

As a result, the country's motor vehicle pool has increased enormously, putting pressure on our roads and highways, which in spite of vast infrastructural spending by the National Roads Authority, are deteriorating, particularly in rural areas. The ongoing failure by Transnet to improve the capacity and efficiency of the country's railways to transport goods has resulted in an upsurge in road transport. Massive trucks and trailers haul goods night and day across the country. Many are overloaded, contributing to the pothole stretches so commonly encountered. I am constantly amused by the plethora of signs warning of "potholes ahead" on road verges. Why spend money on putting up signs? Why not repair the potholes?

The running costs of motoring – and the hassle of traffic jams, ill-disciplined taxi drivers, overturned trucks and so on – have had an interesting impact on the residential property market. According to a

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recent poll by mortgage originator ooba, almost three quarters of South Africans consider the price of petrol as a factor before deciding to buy property.

Commuters are choosing, where possible, to live as close to work as they can, which is changing urban demographics to some extent. Ooba's Western Cape provincial sales manager, Jenny Rushin, says this trend is highlighted in Gauteng by growth in unit sales in the mid-point areas between Johannesburg and Pretoria such as Midrand and Centurion. Other contributing factors, of course, are schools and shopping centres.

DRY HUMOUR

On the subject of motoring, we could be in for a dry Festive Season. New laws being proposed by Transport Minister S'bu Ndebele could see the legal alcohol limit reduced to zero. The current alcohol limit is 0,05g/100ml, roughly equivalent to two cans of beer or a couple of tots of Scotch. For professional drivers – including taxi drivers, note – the limit is 0,02.

As it is, the traffic police have stepped up their road blocks and breathalyser testing on a "no quarter" drive nationally. The campaign has given impetus to the growth of Good Samaritan companies which provide clients with an alternative service when they have had a few too many. You call the service, tell them where

you are – presuming you know and can elucidate – and a team drives to your rescue. A second driver brings you and your vehicle home. One young acquaintance in Cape Town has set up his company, One Way. "That's the point," he says. "Your journey home is one way; you don't leave your vehicle behind as you would with a taxi."

As can be expected, the Minister's proposal has created quite a fuss, but the statistics continually point to alcohol abuse as the major cause of road accidents. The Automobile Association has for some time advocated that the limit be reduced to zero, noting that 50% of people killed in road accidents tested positive for alcohol. On the other hand, 40% of people killed on the road are pedestrians, most of whom were drunk when they were knocked down, according to the AA. How do we police them, I wonder?

The Medical Research Council also agrees with changing the legal limit, adding that in traffic accidents the average driver was three times over the limit and pedestrians four times over the limit.

Quite a number of countries have reduced their alcohol limit to 0,02%. In Brazil there was a 32% decline in road deaths after the dry law was enforced. Enforcement is probably the key. Even with the current South African legal limit, arrests and prosecutions remain relatively low.

The Council suggests that our limit be reduced to either 0,02% or 0,03%, taking the humanitarian view that this would allow for those of us who have been gulping cough mixture or munching liqueur chocolates. Time will tell... ■■■

Fuel Pricing for 2011

Petrol	Reef			Coast		
	Unleaded	95	LRP	Unleaded	95	LRP
05 January 2011	858	873	858	846	849	849
02 February 2011	884	899	884	872	875	875
02 March 2011	927	942	927	915	918	918
06 April 2011	980	996	980	963	966	966
04 May 2011	1009	1025	1009	992	995	995
01 June 2011	1007	1023	1007	990	993	993
06 July 2011	974	992	974	957	962	962
03 August 2011	991	1009	991	974	979	979
07 September 2011	1000	1018	1000	983	988	988
05 October 2011	1037	1054	1037	1020	1024	1024
02 November 2011	1060	1077	1060	1043	1047	1047

Fuel prices are indicated in cents per litre.



THE EDITOR,
STUART MURRAY
stuart.murray@
pamgolding.co.za

Stuart Murray is co-founder and former editor of *Finance Week* magazine.