

For most of the world, petrol is a hot topic. The hottest debate is around BP, of course, as the ecological disaster building up in the Gulf of Mexico is almost matched by the suffering of BP's shareholders. But petrol, and more specifically its price at the pumps, is a ready standby for debate, complaint and commiseration.

That applies in most of the world ... but not in the UAE, where petrol remains so cheap that gas-guzzlers are the norm.

That might be about to change. The cost of petrol in the UAE is actually the highest in the GCC. But with prices much higher in many other parts of the world, there's probably not too much cause for complaint at the news of a nationwide rise which comes into place today. Petrol is going up by 20 fils per litre, so a litre of E-Plus will cost drivers AED 1.61 and Special will be AED 1.72.

It is however the second rise in three months. Prior to this, petrol prices had remained level since April 2005. The reason for the rise? As well as the fact that petrol stations are losing money, buying fuel at international prices, it's also down to fuel consumption. Or to be more precise, an effort to reduce it.

The Emirate is increasingly conscious of the value of its physical environment and the size of its carbon footprint; the region's economies have recorded some of the fastest rates of petrol consumption growth in the world, which count as a major contributor to climate change.

So curbing consumption can only be a good thing. It certainly is a no-brainer that rising prices should deter people and persuade them to consider the options. But the 20 fils increase begs a couple of questions. Petrol is still spectacularly cheap here, so what kind of deterrence are we looking at? And what exactly are the alternative choices? Buses maybe, and car-sharing. And that's it.

There are many travel options in the planning stages – a high-speed rail system to link the Emirates, the Abu Dhabi metro, those shaded pedestrian routes promised within the Plan Abu Dhabi 2030 documents. But within the next say ten years, there really won't be too much

choice. Fill 'er up.