

Driving vs. Flying

By Scott Farrell, aka "Stealth TDI"

There's no doubt many of today's Americans have "fiscal responsibility" on their minds. Those fortunate enough to live close to their families and those who don't need to travel frequently may see travel as a vacation-only "luxury." Personally, I live over 1000 miles from my closest relatives and ~3000 miles from the rest. Seeing them even once every other year can be costly. As a result, I've weighed the merits of driving versus flying on many occasions since leaving home in 1986. If you're reading this on my website or linked in from another VW site, odds are you're a car nut like me and prefer to drive. I'M WITH YOU! There's so



much to see on the road! Before I present my case for driving, I'll concede by saying traveling across the country on limited time is best done via plane and renting a car. Three thousand miles is a LOT of distance to cover and still enjoy the visit if the vacation is less than two weeks long. Add another week to the vacation or add multiple destinations such as those shown in the 5400 mile trip above and I feel differently. That said...



person do their job, and let the rest of us move on!" I'm not a whiner who's going to gripe about how the TSA infringes upon my "civil rights" and all of the other baloney that goes with that rant. Being a career military man, I understand the need for air safety and security, know TSA agents have a tough and thankless job to do, and agree the process is for the greater good. Instead, as a picky consumer who doesn't like being bombarded with radiation and/or fondled by strangers (*and paying for it*), I choose to boycott the entire experience unless it's unavoidable. I'd call for more people to boycott air travel to see how it changes airport business practices. But no one sticks to boycotts. Besides, fewer people flying might mean more traffic on my highways! HAHA!

There are many things I dislike about flying. The potential loss of independence (*or the cost of achieving it with a rental car*) at my destination tops my list. I'm an enthusiast and like driving my car. Therefore, I don't want to pay to drive a different car elsewhere; nor do I want to rely on taxis or others to shuttle me around when I'm on vacation. Next on the list are the heightened security and crowds at airports. Both mandate a need to arrive at least two hours before take-off. The crowds are usually manageable unless I'm stuck behind someone bent on complaining about everything. Sometimes I can see their point. Still, I often think, "*Just shut up, let the*

Most of my regular trips are less than 600 miles. Trips from Norfolk, VA to Boston, MA or Louisville, KY are each ~600 miles. Airfare alone costs around \$400 for one person (*more if traveling on short notice and triple that with the family*). Add \$15/day for parking since I don't want to commit my wife to three hours of travel time while shuttling me to and from the airport. The most economical flights often leave around 6am. That means I have to be there by 4am... up at 2:30 to leave home by 3:15. YUCK! These flights usually have at a layover which sucks at least an hour out of my life and adds the expense of airport food. Once at the destination around noon, it's often another 30-45 minutes to retrieve checked baggage (*which cost \$30 per bag*) and then snag a rental car. The total time from my front door to the hotel is around 8-9 hours. The same drill happens on the way home. Then, usually a few days later, I often find that I have a cold or respiratory illness as a result of sharing confined air with over 100 strangers for six hours or so. I'm really not a hypochondriac. It just happens regardless of whether someone was traveling sick or I was unable to stay properly hydrated during the flights.

As for driving, I often get up around 4am so I can be on the road by 5am. The goal is to leave ahead of rush hour. I usually don't enter the next major city until after its rush hour has passed. The plan works well. I normally drive 600 miles in about 11 hours, arriving before my destination's rush hour. During my trip, I listen to music, eat or drink whatever and whenever I want, sit in a comfortable position with my legs stretched out, have scenery that's far better than a bunch of clouds or the back of someone's seat (*scenery many never get to see*), and have a quiet cabin set to the temperature I want. I get to enjoy my day without being surrounded by people sneezing, coughing, farting, or crying (*children*); nor is it possible for me to be crammed against a large traveler since my car's seats are more spacious than those in coach class. I enjoy regular solitude. So a road trip fills the need quite nicely. I drive a turbo diesel which nets 45 mpg or more on the highway depending on my driving speed. With diesel fuel currently around \$3.75 per gallon, the cost of the 1200 mile round trip is just \$100. Plus, I can pack anything I want in the car, know it won't be rifled through in the name of security, and be certain it will be handled responsibly and not lost... especially computers and other expensive items. I think the 2-3 hour "penalty" is worth the peaceful travel, especially if I get to visit someplace interesting along the way. For example, the photo above was taken at White Sands National Monument during a summer traveling vacation. I think most agree that a "day trip" of 600 miles is best if driven.



Longer trips such as a 3000 mile round trip to see family in Texas is significantly more expensive. I usually take two and a half days to drive each way. So that cuts time from my family and adds four nights in hotels. But it's really not that bad. Fuel costs for a 3000 mile trip work out to \$250. That is still far cheaper than a single airline ticket. The hotel expense is far less than the cost of additional airline seats if traveling with my family. And rental car expenses add up, too, depending on the length of our stay. So I'm still a fan of driving!



I have the option of driving my car when traveling on government orders, too! The government allows travelers to claim \$0.51 per mile up to the cost of air travel. In other words, the government will pay ME to drive myself instead of paying a commercial carrier if it's cost advantageous to do so. Since the \$612 payable for 1200 miles of driving is less than the combined cost of airfare, parking, and a rental car, then that money comes to ME if I drive. It's good management of taxpayer dollars, it's LEGAL, and it compensates me for doing the government's work using my own car, a method of travel I prefer anyway. Also, it's the equivalent of being paid \$30 per hour on top of my regular salary. Driving rocks!

Everyone has to do their own math and determine if their time is worth the expense and potential inconvenience of air travel versus the cost and time of more frequent automotive maintenance. Frequent travelers simply may

not have the time to drive everywhere they need to be, especially for business. For me, my regular travel habits, my joy of driving, the fact that I do most of my own maintenance, and my quest for independence supports my plan to hit the road the vast majority of the time, especially if I can make a few dollars doing it. Safe travels!