



# DRIVING PASSIONS

Social arbiter and people-watcher **Mary Killen** analyses people's relationships with their cars



**THE DRIVER** *Martin Lewis*  
**OCCUPATION** *Money-saving expert*  
**THE CAR** *2003 Smart car coupé*

Broadcaster, journalist and money-saving expert Martin Lewis is genuinely keen on saving both money and time. He still drives the Smart car he bought nine years ago and, as we make torturously slow progress through London traffic between what he calls 'Television Towers', on the South Bank, and 'MSE Towers', the Money Saving Expert offices in Shepherd's Bush, he tells me how it has saved him money; something that Martin is very good at, considering that he has recently sold his website, [www.moneysavingexpert.com](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com), for £87 million.

'When I bought my car in 2003, you could get the capital write-off if you bought it on the company, so it effectively cost me about £4,000. It is a low-insurance category and it is quite fuel efficient for a non-electric car. I used to get 240 miles to a tank and now, because I have changed my driving habits, I get around 300 miles to the tank, which works out at slightly over 10p a mile, which isn't bad in the current environment.

'I do this just by not pressing on the accelerator and not braking so hard. Your accelerator is a money pump and your brake burns the money that you have put into the car and those are the key principles. Also, I don't go above 3,000 revs without changing up a gear.' But far from being a bore about it, Martin says he has turned fuel saving into an enjoyable game and always aims to have beaten his own record each time he fills up.

He is comfortable in the two-seater. 'People often think a Smart car is going to be some tiny little tin box but it's comfortable inside because it is high,' he says. 'It is only when you look behind you that it feels small; then you realise it is basically a normal-size car, cut off in the middle.'

Martin is an exceedingly safe driver. 'As someone whose mother was killed in a car accident, I am not at all sympathetic to people who break the rules - for example, those who talk on mobile phones while they are driving,'

he says. He does, however, like helping us all to save money while motoring. 'There are MOT centres run by the council that are set up primarily for their own vehicles, but by law they also have to let private vehicles have their MOTs done there,' he advises. 'As they don't do repairs, you tend to get far fewer faults; they just consider safety, so they have no vested interest in failing you just to get repair business.'

Martin, who works a 70-hour week, now uses a 125cc scooter to get to work. It takes eight and a half minutes, as opposed to 25 minutes by car, although ideally he prefers public transport so that he can sit and work on his laptop.

'But I am still fond of the Smart car,' says Martin. 'It even has a pet name but I am not telling you what it is. I remember being incredibly excited to buy my first-ever car. I was 31 when I got it and it was a really happy moment of freedom and independence.'

'The Smart car looks nice, it works, and you can park it. It has great safety features and the crumple zone is said to be pretty good, but

there is no way I am going to be in a 70mph collision in central London, which is the only place I drive it. I think that it would be a real trial on the motorway after half an hour.'

What tends to happen when they go to the country is that Martin drives his wife, Lara's car, a 13-year-old Mercedes SLK, which he says is 'much more comfortable'. And even though it is thirstier, Martin has the satisfaction of driving Lara, rather than the other way around, so he can practise his fuel-efficient way of driving. 'Lara always annoys me when she drives because I get so many more miles to the gallon,' says Martin. 'She is happy for me to drive and she just falls asleep.'

Lara is lucky - she must be one of the few women in England who feels safe enough to fall asleep with her husband at the wheel, certain that no risky manoeuvres will take place and no money will be wasted □

*Money Saving Expert: [www.moneysavingexpert.com](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com). For more information on Smart cars, visit [www.smart.com](http://www.smart.com)*

