



AAA + Advocacy

Fall 2006

Most people think of AAA as a membership organization, but AAA also serves the public as a trusted and reliable resource on everything from finding the lowest gas prices to choosing the best hotels on vacation. Consumers often turn to AAA for advice when purchasing a new car or maintaining the one they own. Over the years AAA has built a reputation of providing independent and unbiased information that people have come to depend on.

In addition to providing consumer information and education, AAA often speaks out on issues that affect consumers. AAA is a leading advocate of consumer protection and safety laws, and supports incentives that allow consumers to make responsible choices without sacrificing their options. This issue of AAA + Advocacy highlights some of our recent consumer advocacy efforts.



AAA's Alternative Fuels Advocacy & Education Program

AAA recently surveyed drivers in Northern California, Nevada and Utah about our reliance on gasoline and possible solutions. Eighty-three percent of those surveyed felt it was very important for American drivers to reduce their reliance on gasoline and right now they did not think enough was being done to make this happen. Most of the blame was directed toward oil companies and the federal government, and seventy-nine percent of participants said that automakers have been too slow to develop and sell hybrid vehicles.

Overwhelmingly, respondents strongly supported AAA playing a role in educating consumers about alternative fuels and hybrid vehicles as well as playing an advocacy role in this area. They also wanted to see more consumer campaigns from AAA that provided tips and other information to help drivers reduce their gasoline consumption.

In response, AAA launched the Greenlight Initiative. The program is intended to help consumers make sense of all the new options available and encourage the development of transportation choices. AAA created the Greenlight website - www.aaa.com/greenlight - where consumers can find information about alternative fuels, locate alternative fuel refueling stations, and learn about upcoming Greenlight events.

The biggest event to date was the Greenlight Road Rally in July. More than a dozen alternative fuel vehicles participated in the Rally, traveling a 117-mile course from Santa Clara to Sacramento. Rally participants showcased the latest in alternative fuel technology, including cars powered by hydrogen fuel cells, biodiesel, natural gas, plug-in hybrid, electricity and propane.

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Greenlight Rally Starting Line-up in Santa Clara



Greenlight Rally Festival in Sacramento



Visitors at the Greenlight Rally Festival

New Key Code Law Offers Consumer Protection

AAA sponsors legislation to help motorists get on their way

Many new car models now require a special manufacturer's code to be programmed into the key in order to operate the vehicle. If a driver's key is lost, broken or stolen, a replacement key can only be obtained from a car dealer who has the necessary security code. Service departments are typically closed at night and on the weekends, often leaving drivers stranded.



AAA saw that this was a common predicament, receiving nearly 6,000 calls every month in California alone for locksmith service where it was necessary to replace the vehicle owner's key. In many cases the inconvenience caused significant delays, added expense or risk of personal safety to consumers.

AAA believed this was a fundamental issue of consumer rights; you paid for the car, so you should have the right to get a replacement key without a lot of unnecessary hassle. AAA took action by sponsoring SB 1542 (Migden) to allow registered locksmiths to make replacement keys for motorists who need them.

The Governor signed the bill into law, which will go into effect on January 1, 2008. The law increases convenience for car owners and responsibly gives registered locksmiths the ability to make replacement car keys while taking common sense security measures to safeguard the information.

The new law will apply to most vehicles sold or leased in California and requires vehicle manufacturers to provide registered owners of vehicles or members of their family the means to obtain information allowing the reproduction of a key or similar entry device. The law allows only a registered locksmith to obtain this information for the purposes of entering, starting and operating the owner's registered vehicle. Car manufacturers are required to make this information available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Election Roundup

California transportation got a much needed boost from this November's election. Both Proposition 1A and 1B easily passed with 77% and 61% support, respectively. AAA was among the many business leaders and industry groups who advocated for their passage to secure transportation funding for long overdue infrastructure improvements. In addition, two local transportation sales taxes that AAA supported in the Central Valley were renewed. Fresno and San Joaquin County measures both passed with 77% support. Now that the funding has been secured, AAA will continue to work with other stakeholders to ensure that the money is spent on the most critical and effective projects for the State.

State Senate Declares November "Hybrid Vehicle Awareness Month"

The State of California recognized the importance of AAA's commitment to raising awareness about hybrid vehicles and passed Senate Concurrent Resolution 132, declaring this November "Hybrid Vehicle Awareness Month".

Throughout the month AAA will offer a variety of activities and information to Members and the general public to educate them about hybrids and other alternative fuel vehicles and technology.

AAA kicked off the month with free Hybrid Driver Training Seminars to teach hybrid owners how to maximize the performance and fuel efficiency of their hybrid cars. The two-hour seminars, held at Infineon Raceway in Sonoma, provided both in-class and in-vehicle instruction from AAA's automotive experts. AAA also produced a Hybrid Driving Tips brochure that will be available at all AAA offices during November.

AAA will feature an alternative fuels showcase at this year's San Francisco International Auto Show, November 18-26. Six vehicles representing the latest in alternative fuel technology including a prototype all-electric SUT, a plug-in hybrid that gets 100+ mpg and a Ford Focus hydrogen fuel cell, waste vegetable oil car, and a compressed natural gas police car will be on display. Automotive experts will be on hand throughout the week to discuss the future of the automobile.



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A Look Back...

AAA Celebrates 25 years of Approved Auto Repair

As early as the 1910s, AAA advocated for consumers by designating "official hotels and garages" where members were assured of "courteous treatment and no overcharges." We encouraged our members to contact the main office in San Francisco to lodge any complaints, ensuring a high standard of service among these establishments. Following World War II, we initiated our Approved Accommodations program, hiring a crew to inspect and re-inspect facilities annually.

Over the years, the AAA Approved sign became a guarantee of good service. Members and the public who took road trips or traveled came to depend on the AAA Approved sign for clean and comfortable accommodations.

By the late 1970s, AAA recognized that consumers similarly needed to find consistent, high-quality auto repair facilities. As a result we officially introduced Approved Auto Repair in 1982 - solidifying work we started over sixty years ago.



Just like Approved Accommodations, AAA evaluated and endorsed Approved Auto Repair stations that provided guaranteed, high-quality workmanship. We reviewed cases when a dispute arose over the quality of work that could not be resolved between the member and the repair facility. Facilities agreed to abide by AAA's decision in any dispute with a member.

Today we continue to approve repair facilities based on stringent AAA standards. We even provide our own repair facilities - Car Care Plus centers that fix your brakes, change your oil, service your tires and make most other repairs your car may need. Our consumer advocacy for quality automotive repair is just another part of AAA's heritage of public service.

In Sacramento, hundreds of attendees were treated to a festival atmosphere offering interactive demonstrations about alternative fuels. The event was a huge success on all accounts and AAA plans to host similar events in other regions of Northern California, Nevada and Utah in the coming year.

As part of its commitment to the Greenlight Initiative, AAA's cars will be going green as well. Over the next two years the company's fleet of 400 vehicles will be replaced with Toyota Priuses and Ford Escape hybrids. AAA made the decision to switch to hybrids after an exhaustive analysis confirmed that a move to hybrid vehicles would save the organization money in the long run. The cars are used primarily by insurance employees whose job requires the use of a vehicle.

AAA Sponsors Greenbelt Alliance 2007 TOD Urban Outings

AAA has partnered with Greenbelt Alliance to help educate and engage local officials, community leaders and residents in planning transit-oriented development in their neighborhoods. The first Urban Outing of 2007 will be TOD planning around the Sonoma-Marin Rail Transit line.

Who: City council members, planning commissioners, and staff of cities along the SMART rail line

What: A panel of four urban design experts will lead a technical discussion of important components to include in successful development around transit stations

When: Thursday, January 18th, 9:00-11:00am

Where: Santa Rosa City Council Chamber

Urban outings are open to the public and usually include a walking tour of the area followed by a seminar or discussion. For more information, please visit www.greenbelt.org.

AAA's Advocacy Mission

For more than 100 years, AAA of Northern California has steadfastly spoken out on behalf of its Members and the traveling public. Because our 4.4 million Members in Northern California, Nevada and Utah represent a broad section of the population, the association works for balanced public policy positions on a variety of issues ranging from traffic safety and transportation to consumer protection and the environment.