

Gas is here if you know where, when to look

Chevron is supplying Warm Springs with over 100,000 gallons of gas a month. You just have to know where to get it.

by Cynthia Stowell

If you're a tourist looking for gas on the weekends, Warm Springs may be a trouble spot. But if you're a local, the chances are you'll have all the gas you need — if you plan ahead.

While George Clements' Chevron station and Macy's Store had their May allocations cut 18 per cent from last May the Chevron-supplied Tribal Garage and vehicle pool are pumping as much gas as ever.

Weekends will be tricky, since Macy's is closed Sunday and the Tribal Garage is open only five days a week. But if they time it right, locals should not even notice a gas shortage.

George's advice to local drivers is to get their gas early on the weekend. His pumps have been running dry on Sunday morning, with unleaded going first. "If it gets crucial, I'll have to put a volume limit on tourists," said George, indicating that locals would be his first priority.

Dan Macy ran out of his May allocation on the 17th but with a bit of horse trading he was able to stock his tank until the 22nd when he ran out again. More trading with a station that hadn't used its allocation filled the tank again and Macy hopes that his supply will last until May 29 when allocations are raised from 82 1/2 per cent to 90 per cent for the month of June.

Don't panic

So the gas is around — but you're never sure where. Macy attributes his shortage to overflow business from George and a 25 per cent increase in vehicles in the area. But some feel that panicked people are hoarding gasoline, creating greater pressure at peak times. And of course heavy tourist traffic puts a pinch on weekend supplies.

"I don't think there's going to be a real shortage on fuel in Warm Springs," said Tribal Garage supervisor Leon Maxwell. The important thing is not to panic and hoard gas, he advised. Despite Maxwell's optimism, the Tribal Garage, which pumps primarily for private customers but also provides for Bureau of Indian Affairs vehicles, may be the first to get cut if the Tribes lose any of their allocation, said Enterprise Manager Ed Manion. But so far the gas is there for the taking, Monday through Friday, 8-5.

Drivers with vehicle pool pump keys will find plentiful supplies of fuel on weekends. The Tribes have been exempted from Department of Energy cut backs because of their service orientation and their association with the wood products business, according to Manion.

"I smelled a rat a year ago," added Manion, "and asked for an increase in the allocation." The Tribes are now receiving 100 per cent of their 240,000 gallons per year allocation and may have the opportunity to apply for more.

Although all the gas in Warm Springs is supplied by Chevron, George Clements feels less secure about the future than anyone else. He just learned that his June allocation will be 90 per cent but never knows from

month to month what to expect. "We're the last guys to learn what's going on," he said.

George expects things to get tougher when the tourists pick up and school lets out, he said. He wonders about the continuation of weekend supplements beyond the Monday-Wednesday-Friday deliveries, although on Memorial Day two deliveries will ease the pressure. And he worries about the people who are obviously topping off their tanks and depriving those with empty tanks.

Generally customers are understanding and cooperative, he noted. "Everyone seems to have adjusted to our shorter hours." (He is open 8-7 daily except Sunday when doors close as the pumps go dry). And as far as prices, "Last year people coming through would complain, but this year they aren't even looking at the price."

Prices up, profits frozen

And prices are climbing steadily. Stickers on George's pumps show the upward trend since the first of the year. Regular dipped momentarily from 73.5 to 72 then leaped to 76, climbing to 77.5 and then 83.9.

George doesn't know where it will end. All he knows is that his profit margin is frozen at 15 cents a gallon, and "It's getting damn tough to make a living." With a limit on profits per gallon and a limit on gallons pumped, it gets harder and harder for George to pay the bills. "People probably think I'm tight," remarked George, "but with these gas allocations I can't afford to extend credit to anyone."

Dealers' profit margins have been frozen by the federal government according to this formula: the margin that a dealer was getting on May 15, 1973 plus 3 cents plus rent increases. George said his prices (83.9 regular, 85.9 unleaded, and 87.9 supreme) are more in line with Madras prices now because other dealers are taking their maximum margin (as he always has) rather than pricing competitively. Lower prices no longer result in greater sales volumes since dealers are on fixed allocations, he said. The gap between George's gas and other stations in Madras has narrowed also because Chevron is selling gas to its dealers 3-5 cents cheaper than other companies.

Macy's gas is a bit more (83.9 and 87.9) because as an independent dealer he is frozen by a different formula. Pumps at the vehicle pool look like antiques with prices ranging from 66.5 to 70.3. This is because gas is being sold at cost. Tribal Garage prices look good (76.5, 80.5) because the Tribes hold the margin to 7 cents, enough to cover salaries and break even.

Regulations and more regulations

Like George, Chevron distributor Gordon Shown also feels as if his hands are tied. As a commission agent he can only sell as much gas as he is allocated at the price set by Chevron. "My livelihood is based on the number of gallons I sell," commented Shown. And with the cutbacks come complications in record-keeping, raising his overhead.

"It puts me in a bind," said the distributor.

Shown operates from a print-out of customers' allocations that has been revised three times in the last four months. "They keep changing the base period," he said. Allocations, which "began in earnest in February," were originally based on gallons pumped in 1972. Now service stations are based on November 77 - October 1978 levels. Shown expects another revision in June, making the base period the last of 1978 and the first part of 1979.

Different products have been cut at different levels. While motor gasoline is being allocated at 82 1/2 per cent, diesel and home heating oil have only been cut to 95 per cent.

To confuse things further, there are 40 different categories of businesses that are exempt from cutbacks, said Shown. Loggers and farmers are among them, as well as emergency services such as fire and ambulance operations. This bodes well for local enterprises. Neither Warm Springs Forest Products Industries and its allied logging and thinning industries nor private farmers should be affected by cutbacks. Apparently the Tribes and Bureau of Indian Affairs fall into exempt categories because

of the kinds of services provided.

Who is making the decisions and what do they want?

Local dealers and distributors feel as helpless as the vehicle owners amidst such regulations, the source of which is not clear. It is a world of victims, with no one taking responsibility for decisions that are affecting everyone.

Many question whether there is even a shortage of oil. "I don't know where the shortage is," said Clements. "There's no proof that there is one."

But Dave Vannett, wholesale supervisor for Chevron's Seattle division, has a simple textbook explanation for the fuel situation: "The demand is greater than the availability." He blames the difficulties in Iran which according to a national magazine took 2 million barrels of crude oil off the world market, shorting the U.S. 800,000 barrels. Vannett also points to the higher cost of crude oil.

Chevron is 40-50 per cent dependent on imported oil, said Vannett, and is naturally affected by such increases as the OPEC nations' recent 20 per cent boost. As a result, refineries are operating at 85 per cent capacity. Vannett noted that Chevron is

using a high percentage of its income for further exploration and development of new domestic sources of oil.

But in the meantime, Chevron's allocation department in its San Francisco office is conforming to Department of Energy regulations on the allocation of existing supplies, regulations that Vannett says are "pretty cut and dry." Each of Chevron's nine regional operating divisions simply follows the regulations as passed down to them said Vannett, occasionally challenging businesses; statements of their current requirements. But even those decisions are ultimately referred to the Department of Energy, he said.

Whatever decisions are being made in D.C., it is not clear to consumers whether they are being asked to pay more or use less. For now people in Warm Springs seem to be content to pay more and be thankful that there is any gas at all. This community may never see a real shortage if everyone becomes wise to the whereabouts of the gas and the opportune times for filling up.

Conservation might be forced only on the tourists who have nightmares about their Winnebagoes choking to a stop on Sidwaller Flat.

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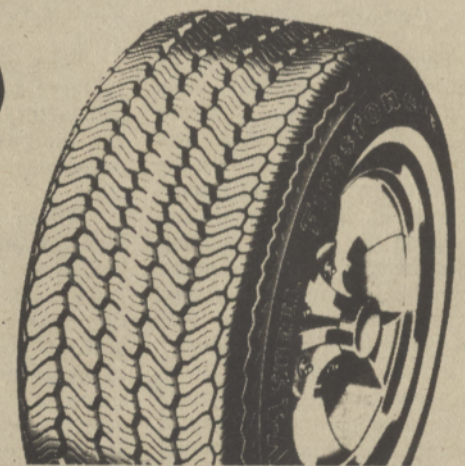
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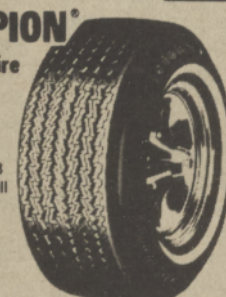
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