

# **15% Petrol Price Hike Presents High Street Christmas Shoppers with £78 Million Bill – Before They Have Even Hit the Shops**



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Soaring fuel prices are forcing more consumers to shop on their computers rather than on the high street this Christmas, according to independent price comparison and switching service, uSwitch.com. A 15% rise in petrol prices since last November has pushed the bill for driving to the shops and parking the car up to a staggering £78 million – and that's before any presents have been bought. As a result, despite the postal strikes that were widely predicted to drive consumers back onto the high street, research amongst uSwitch.com's consumer panel reveals that over 7 out of 10 (72%) people are doing their Christmas shopping online this year.

The price of petrol, which has climbed from 95p to 109p per litre over the last 12 months has done nothing to help consumers struggling through a tough year. While pressure remains on oil companies to lower prices, the situation is not set to improve imminently. The AA has warned that end of the VAT cut will add an estimated 2.4p per litre to pump prices from January. As a result, shoppers heading onto the high street this Christmas could face fuel bills of up to £8million.

However, it is the cost of car parking that is really set to send shoppers in a spin this Christmas. With the average trip costing £9 in parking fees, consumers will be spending a staggering £70 million parking their cars to go Christmas shopping this year - nearly 10 times

the cost of the fuel they use for their round trip. Of the UK's top ten largest cities it comes as no surprise that Londoners are stung the most, paying an average of £18 for up to four hours parking, while shoppers in Bradford are charged a fifth of the price - a meagre £3.50.

In total, [uSwitch.com](http://uSwitch.com) estimates that Christmas shoppers are set to spend £78 million driving to the shops this Christmas - a bill that could be cut by staying at home and buying gifts on the internet. According to research amongst uSwitch.com's consumer opinion panel, the recession has given rise to a new generation of online shoppers. And, contrary to speculation that postal strikes and high street discounts are preventing people from logging on, 1 in 5 (19%) consumers say they have increased the amount of web-based purchases made since the downturn began. A further quarter (26%) are planning to increase the amount of purchases they make via the web this Christmas and 6 out of 10 (59%) believe there are better bargains to be had online than on the high street.

According to the research, internet shopping has varied appeal. 75% appreciate the ease and convenience of surf-shopping compared with trudging the high street, whilst 44% cite the ability to purchase specialist items that aren't available anywhere else as the web's main plus point. In addition, nearly three quarters of consumers (72%) state that they find it easier to stick to a budget when shopping online - as they are more aware of the mounting totals and are less likely to succumb to the temptation of browsing. Books are the most popular items purchased on the web - hardly surprising considering the top ten bestselling paperbacks are currently offered online with a 55% discount on the recommended retail price.

Online retailers have seen a 14% growth in year on year sales with UK consumers spending an estimated £31 billion online between January and August. Amazon ranked as the number one online retailer last Christmas, and with new initiatives such as free delivery on almost all orders, looks set to hit the 36% sales growth forecast for Q4 this year.

London and Northern Ireland lead the way when it comes to online bargain hunting, spending an average of 1.48 hours shopping online every week. This is closely followed by Wales (1.46 hours), the South West (1.43), and Scotland (1.41 hours). Web users in the North East are the least frequent online shoppers, spending just 1.23 hours a week browsing for bargains.

**Ann Robinson, Director of Consumer Policy at uSwitch.com, says:** "Consumers are fighting an ongoing battle to make their money go further. This year they have had no choice but to take a hard look at their spending and adapt their lifestyles to cope.

"Christmas shoppers heading onto the high streets are being stung not once but twice, with high prices at the pump and astronomical car park fees. It's no wonder that many are ditching the high street and choosing to shop from the comfort of their own home. Nearly 17 million homes now have [broadband](#) – a massive jump from 7 million just three years ago – and it's getting cheaper and faster to use. With broadband as cheap as £5.99 a month it's easy to see why we as consumers have wholeheartedly embraced online shopping."

### **uSwitch.com's Top 3 Online Shopping Safety Tips**

- Only use reputable brands and check that a contact address and telephone number is available in case of queries.
- Before providing any payment details on the website, check that there is a padlock icon at the bottom of your screen, and that the web address in your browser starts with 'https'.
- If possible, use a credit rather than a debit card for extra protection against fraud.

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### **About**

uSwitch.com is a free, impartial online and telephone-based comparison and switching service, helping consumers compare prices on gas, electricity, water, heating cover, home telephone, broadband, digital television, mobile phones, personal finance products and car insurance.

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