

Moscow's Streets Jammed as Always on No-Car Day

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Moscow streets were paralyzed by the usual traffic jams on Thursday, as the capital celebrated World Car-Free Day — an unofficial event that could result in motorists saving millions of rubles on gasoline.

Road traffic was at typical levels of congestion for the morning rush hour, but the situation in the second half of the day was a bit more difficult than usual due to the fact that part of the Moscow Ring Road was closed, said Leonid Mednikov, an analyst at Yandex.Probki — proving that motorists are not ready to give up their preferred mode of transportation.

"I got stuck in a traffic jam for 40 minutes where it usually takes me 15 minutes to drive," said Gennady, 26, a restaurant manager.

He said, however, that he didn't intend to give up his car in honor of the unofficial holiday because he drives a lot for business.

Lev, a 24-year-old sales manager, also said he couldn't do without a car because of his tight schedule.

"I would be glad not to drive, but I can't. I work outside of Moscow and have to quickly make it back to town after work not to miss my university classes," he said.

The average price for Ai-92 gasoline in Moscow is now 27.10 rubles a liter, while city motorists use about 11,000 tons of gasoline a day, said Andrei Gordeyev, an analyst at consulting company Vergen Group, which focuses on the oil and gasoline market.

That means giving up cars for a day could result in Muscovites saving about 392 million rubles (\$13 million) in gasoline expenses.

But most Muscovites ignored the global initiative, with only 31 percent of them indicating a willingness to sacrifice their wheels for one day, according to a study by recruiting web site SuperJob.ru, which interviewed 1,800 motorists across Russia.

A total of 26 percent of the country's motorists said they weren't ready to give up their cars, the study said.

Drivers weren't swayed by attractive public transportation fares — lowered 50 percent for one day — or the personal example of some Moscow officials who used alternative means.

The head of City Hall's nature protection department, Anton Kulbachevsky, came to his office by bicycle, Interfax reported, while Mayor Sergei Sobyenin took a commuter train to Rizhsky Station.

A total of 3.9 million vehicles were registered in Moscow as of February, and the figure increases by about 300,000 annually, according to Sergei Kazantsev, head of the local traffic police.

Moscow participated in World Car-Free Day — an annual ecological event aimed at encouraging motorists to give up their vehicles for the sake of the environment — for the fourth time, although the initiative has yet to result in a tangible reduction of traffic jams in the capital.

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