

Alert on pricey petrol

ANNE MATHER

HUGE variations in petrol prices across Hobart have prompted the RACT to expose some areas as no-go zones for motorists wanting to refuel.

The state's peak motoring body warned people away from Hobart's southern suburbs yesterday and redirected them to the Eastern Shore.

The RACT's weekly price monitoring revealed unleaded petrol in the Kingborough area was being sold for 16c more than on the Eastern Shore. RACT public policy general

Steer clear of Hobart's south, RACT says

manager Vince Taskunas said it was "disappointing" that four outlets in Kingborough were "struck" on 158.9c for unleaded while the Eastern Shore was offering it for 139.7c. Mr. Taskunas said even a short drive away from the Eastern Shore petrol prices rose sharply, with prices up to 154.7c a litre in central Hobart. "It's a mixed bag, so we recommend that motorists shop around," he said.

Mr. Taskunas said even some suburbs had wide variations within them. He said Tasmanians were not in the habit of shopping around for fuel, but they needed to change their habits. According to the RACT's monitoring, unleaded petrol price ranges in Hobart were:

- Southern suburbs: all 158.9c.
- Tasmanian Automobile Chamber of Commerce general manager Malcolm Little said the variations were proof of healthy competition in the state. "There is some serious discounting going on," Mr. Little said. He said the wholesale price of unleaded was between 148c and 150c a litre. "Anything less than that is

at the expense of the service station, or else the oil company is supporting them," he said. Mr. Little said some retailers might also be recouping some of the losses they might have made through discounting in recent times. "If there is a good price range it shows there is genuine competition in the market — which is contrary to what the RACT has said in the past," Mr. Little said.

Mr. Taskunas said the RACT wanted to undertake daily petrol-price monitoring on behalf of motorists and would argue the case at next week's fuel summit. Stakeholders will meet at the Premier's fuel summit in Launceston on Thursday. The summit will look at issues including alternative fuels, public transport and urban design. Mr. Taskunas said it was a shame that petrol pricing, including competition and transparency, was not on the agenda.



PEDALA CAUSE: Party bosses, from left, Premier David Bartlett, Greens leader Nick McKim and Liberal leader Will Hodgman will join the Critical Mass bike ride at Franklin Square yesterday. Picture: NIKKI DAVIS-JONES

Exploding oxygen cylinder blamed

AIR safety investigators have blamed an exploding oxygen cylinder for blowing holes in the fuselage and floor of a Qantas plane mid-air, and warn it could happen again.

Investigators found the cylinder — one of several in the cargo hold — blew a hole near the wing and shot up through the cabin floor before it dropped back into the hold and was sucked out of the aircraft through the ruptured fuselage.

The Australian Transport Safety Bureau released its preliminary report yesterday.

Investigators still are to determine what caused the cylinder to fail as the plane flew from Hong Kong to Melbourne on July 25, with 346 passengers and 19 crew on board.

While the event was rare, bureau investigator Julian Walsh said he could not rule out a similar event in the future.

Bike push reaches a . . . political mass

ANNE MATHER

THEY looked so pretty as they were riding along . . . to borrow a bit from an old pop song.

Politically they all sing to a different tune, but Tasmania's three political leaders united yesterday in their passion for pedal power.

Hobart's Critical Mass bike ride attracted about 200 cyclists last night, including Premier David Bartlett, Liberal leader Will Hodgman and Greens leader Nick McKim.

Critical Mass is a monthly bike ride held in cities across the globe to celebrate cycling and assert cyclists' rights on the road.

The Hobart event brought the leaders together for their first shared ride — and a shared dream. Each of them expressed a desire for Tasmania to become a more bike-friendly state.

Mr Bartlett, a regular bike rider, said he would like to see safer cycleways throughout Tasmania. "I think we can do much better," he said.

Mr Bartlett said his Government had committed \$4 million in the Budget for cycleway projects. Mr McKim, a "semi-regular" bike rider, said cycling had environmental and health benefits.

The Greens leader said Critical Mass was a great way to educate the public about the need to

look out for cyclists on the road. Mr Hodgman said he did not have the time to ride as often as he would like. "My bike sits in my office too much".

But he said he was committed to the state developing a master plan for more bike paths.

Last night's Critical Mass riders started at Franklin Square and cycled around Hobart to Salamanca Place.

The event was promoted by a new community group called Healthy Transport Hobart, comprised of nursing and medical students who want to plug cycling as a safe mode of transport. Critical Mass meets on the last Friday of every month.

Tough times, but not for divorce

DIVORCES are at their lowest in 15 years and the escalating cost of living may be a factor behind it.

Official figures show there were 47,963 divorces last year, the lowest number since the 45,729 granted in 1992.

The number of marriage break-ups dropped 6 per cent from the

51,375 divorces recorded in 2006 — making it the largest year-on-year fall in two decades.

Relationships Australia suggested the economic environment could be behind the latest result.

Vice-president Anne Holthaus said people tended to stay together during tough economic times.

Divorces have been trending downward for the past seven years, after a sharp spike in 2001, and people are staying married for longer before untying the knot.

In 1997 there were 51,300, which the bureau said, at the time, reflected a slow long-term increase in the number of broken marriages.

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