Feifei
Hello and welcome to The English We Speak with me, Feifei…

Roy
…and me, Roy.

Feifei
In this programme, we have an expression to describe when someone is very tired and has used all their energy. It can also be used for things when they’re out of battery or fuel. Speaking of which, Roy - you look exhausted!

Roy
Thanks, Feifei! Do I look that bad? I do feel tired though!

Feifei
Roy, you look like you’re running on fumes.

Roy
You mean my car has run out of petrol? I usually say my car is running on fumes when the fuel needle shows empty, but somehow the car keeps going!

Feifei
Yes, the phrase ‘running on fumes’ does relate to cars, but we also use it to talk about people! You look like you have no energy, so you’re running on fumes!

Roy
I suppose I am. It must be all the hard work I’m doing to help people learn English.

Feifei
Hard work?! I saw you sleeping at your desk the other day!

Roy
Exactly! I was so tired and running on fumes that I fell asleep!
Feifei
Hmmm anyway, let’s listen to these examples…

Examples

He’s been working so hard at work recently. He’s running on fumes. I’m worried about him.

Towards the end of the match, the footballer said she was running on fumes.

I was running on fumes yesterday. I couldn’t concentrate in the meeting.

Feifei
This is The English We Speak from BBC Learning English. We’re talking about the expression ‘running on fumes’, which describes a situation where you have no energy, but you keep going. So why else are you so tired?

Roy
Well, I have a baby and he cries a lot. I spend all night looking after him, so I have no energy.

Feifei
Ahhh, that makes sense. Why didn’t you call me to say you you’d be in work later?

Roy
Well my phone was running out of battery. It was running on fumes.

Feifei
Sounds like everything in your life is running on fumes! You, your car, your phone!

Roy
True, but I’m really impressed you compared me with a car earlier. If I were a car, I’d probably be a really expensive sports car.

Feifei
Roy, if you were a car, you probably wouldn’t even have all four wheels. Bye!

Roy
Bye.