

DRIVING SAFELY IN SNOW AND ICE



Introduction

Winter motoring requires special care and a little preparation if you are to avoid a breakdown or accident. The best advice for driving in bad winter weather is not to drive at all, if you can avoid it.

Do not go out until the snow ploughs and gritting vehicles have had a chance to do their work, and allow yourself extra time to reach your destination.

If you must drive in snowy conditions, make sure your car is well prepared and that you know how to handle your car in dangerous road conditions.

It is helpful to practice winter driving techniques in a snowy, open car park, so you are familiar with how your car handles.

Consult your owner's manual for tips specific to driving your vehicle in slippery conditions.

This guide is to help you with your journeys in severe weather, especially as it gets worse over winter.

Make sure you listen out for weather warnings and be prepared to change or delay your journey depending on advice being given.

It is recommended that you always check your route before you set out. Check the real-time traffic information provided for your routes.

Driving safely on icy roads

- decrease your speed and leave yourself plenty of room to stop. You should allow at least three times more space than usual between you and the car in front of you
- if your tyres are making virtually no noise this could be a sign that you are driving on ice
- brake gently to avoid skidding. If your wheels start to lock up, ease off the brake
- turn on your lights to increase your visibility to other motorists
- keep your lights and windscreen clean
- using low gears will help you keep traction, especially on hills. Higher gears can be used for better overall control
- do not use cruise control on icy roads
- be especially careful on bridges and infrequently travelled roads, which will freeze first. Even at temperatures above freezing, if the conditions are wet, you might encounter ice in shady areas or on exposed roadways like bridges
- do not pass snow ploughs and gritting vehicles. The drivers have limited visibility, and you are likely to find the road in front of them worse than the road behind
- do not assume your vehicle can handle all conditions. Even four-wheel and front-wheel drive vehicles can encounter trouble on winter roads
- clear any snow off the roof of the vehicle before you drive off. It can slip down over the windscreen and obscure your view or blow onto the vehicle behind you
- if your vehicle skids depress the clutch and turn the steering wheel into the direction of the skid. When the vehicle straightens, steer along the road. Do not brake – it will just lock up your wheels and you will skid further.

Rear wheel skids

- take your foot off the accelerator
- steer in the direction you want the front wheels to go. If your rear wheels are sliding left, steer left. If they are sliding right, steer right
- if your rear wheels start sliding the other way as you recover, ease the steering wheel toward that side. You might have to steer left and right a few times to get your vehicle completely under control
- if you are forced to brake and have standard brakes, pump them gently
- if you are forced to brake and have anti-lock brakes (ABS), do not pump the brakes. Apply steady pressure to the brakes. You will feel the brakes pulse — this is normal.

Front wheel skids

- take your foot off the accelerator and depress the clutch but do not try to steer immediately.
If your vehicle starts to skid:
- depress the clutch. Do not brake
- turn the steering wheel into the direction of the skid
- when the vehicle straightens, steer along the road
- release the clutch and accelerate gently.

If you get stuck

- do not spin your wheels. This will only dig you in deeper
- turn your wheels from side to side a few times to push snow out of the way
- use a light touch on the accelerator, to ease your car out
- use a shovel to clear snow away from the wheels and the underside of the car
- pour sand, cat litter, gravel or salt in the path of the wheels, to help get traction
- try rocking the vehicle. (Check your owner's manual first — it can damage the transmission on some vehicles.)
Shift from forward to reverse, and back again. Each time you're in gear, give a light touch on the accelerator until the vehicle gets going.

Winter preparation

Prepare your car for winter. A check-up should include:

- check ignition, brakes, wiring, hoses and fan belts
- changing and adjusting the spark plug
- check air, fuel and emission filters
- inspect the distributor
- check the battery. Most batteries last between two and four years. Make sure yours is fully charged and replace it if you are not sure it is reliable
- check the tyres for air, sidewall wear and tread depth
- check antifreeze levels
- service the vehicle
- keep lights clean and check bulbs regularly so you'll be prepared for lower visibility and shorter days
- ensure your tyres are inflated to the manufacturers' recommended pressure and have at least 3mm of tread depth – enables a better grip on the road
- make sure wiper blades aren't worn so you can keep your windscreen as clean as possible for the extra spray, ice and rain

- dirty windows and mirrors can make it hard to see as the low winter sun hits. Make sure they are kept clean and free of ice and snow in colder weather. Ensure windows are clear and de-misted before setting off!
- finally, take a map to help in any unplanned diversions.

Necessary equipment

An emergency situation on the road can arise at any time and you must be prepared. In addition to making sure you have a full tank of fuel, and fresh anti-freeze, it is recommended you should carry the following items in your boot:

- properly inflated spare tyre, wheel wrench and functional jack
- shovel
- bag of salt or cat litter
- tool kit
- ice scraper, de-icer and snow brush
- torch and extra batteries
- warm clothes, woollen hat and gloves and a woollen blanket or sleeping bag
- a pair of boots
- first-aid kit
- battery jump leads
- food and a warm drink in a flask for particularly cold weather
- a pair of sunglasses in the glove compartment to protect from the glare from the low winter sun
- reflective triangles
- compass
- exterior windscreen cleaner
- wooden stick matches in a waterproof container
- scissors and string/cord
- fluorescent or brightly coloured cloth.

If you become stranded

- do not leave your car unless you know exactly where you are, how far it is to possible help, and are certain you will improve your situation
- to attract attention, hang a brightly coloured cloth from your radio aerial
- if you are sure the car's exhaust pipe is not blocked, run the engine and heater for about 10 minutes every hour or so depending upon the amount of fuel in the tank
- to protect yourself from frostbite and hypothermia use the woollen items and blankets to keep warm
- keep at least one window open slightly. Heavy snow and ice can seal a car shut
- eat and drink food carried in vehicle.

Updates

The latest information on road conditions on UK motorways and trunk roads is available from the Highways Agency website at <http://www.highways.gov.uk/> or from the Highways Agency Information Line on 08457 50 40 30

Traffic Radio is available on Digital radio or via the internet at: <http://www.trafficradio.org.uk/> or on local radio bulletins
•information on weather conditions is available from the Met Office at: <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/> or local radio broadcasts.

Further information

www.brake.org.uk/facts/winter-driving www.theaa.com/motoring_advice/seasonal/winter

If you require further information visit: www.barbour-ehs.com

Sources

The AA online
TWC - Travel Smart

January 2010

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