

Take control of winter driving

Driving in winter can be a challenge for even the most experienced person behind the wheel.

Even though weather and road conditions can be at their worst, many of us fail to prepare our vehicles properly for those conditions and sometimes drive as though it was midsummer.

Keeping a vehicle in good repair reduces the chances of an accident at any time of year, but especially in winter. If you haven't done so already, make sure of the following:

- Battery properly charged, ignition system and all lights working.
- Brakes operating equally.
- Tires in good condition, with all-season radials for areas with light snowfall and winter radials for areas that receive heavy snowfall.
- Exhaust system properly sealed against leaks.
- Radiator and hoses free of leaks, antifreeze sufficient for the coldest weather.
- Windshield wipers functioning efficiently, washer container topped up with antifreeze.

Before you start out, warm up the vehicle to reduce moisture condensing on the inside of windows — but do not warm up inside a garage.

If you are going to be driving a significant distance, plan the trip and check on the conditions you're likely to encounter.

Don't forget to buckle your seatbelt, and keep it buckled.

On the road:

- Drive smoothly and slowly, remembering that posted speed limits are for ideal travel conditions.
- Be alert. Black ice will make a road look



like shiny new asphalt. Pavement should look grey-white in winter.

- Plan ahead. When braking on snow or ice, pump gently so you don't skid and to warn drivers behind you.
- Reduce speed while approaching intersections covered with ice or snow.
- Do not use cruise control. Winter driving requires you to be in full control at all times.
- Drive with low-beam headlights on. They are brighter than daytime running lights and turning them on also activates the tail lights, making your vehicle more visible.
- Lengthen the following distance behind the vehicle ahead of you. Stopping distance on an icy road is double that of stopping on a dry one.
- Stay in the right-hand lane except when passing and use turn signals when changing lanes.
- Steer with smooth, precise movements. Changing lanes too quickly and jerky steering while braking or accelerating can cause skidding.
- Be very cautious when approaching

a bridge. Steel and concrete bridges are likely to be icy even when there is no ice on the asphalt surface, because bridges over open air cool down faster than roads, which tend to be insulated somewhat by solid ground.

- Be patient and pass other cars only when it is safe to do so.

The scariest aspect of winter driving, of course, is when you or someone else loses control.

Remaining as calm as you can is key if you go into a skid. Here are some ways to avoid a serious accident:

- Do not brake.
- Do not accelerate.
- If you have an automatic transmission, shift to neutral. However, if you cannot do that immediately, do not touch the shifter.
- If you're using manual transmission, depress the clutch.

More braking tips

Determine whether your vehicle has anti-lock brakes.

When braking without anti-lock brakes use the "heel-and-toe" method. Keep your heel on the floor and use your toes to press the brake pedal firmly just short of locking up the wheels. Release the pressure on the pedal, and press again in the same way. Repeat this until you come to a full stop.

With anti-lock brakes you also can use heel-and-toe method, but do not remove your foot from the brake pedal until the vehicle comes to a complete stop.

This is the time of year in which snow, ice and poor visibility make things dangerous for drivers and pedestrians. Don't add to the danger by failing to drive according to those conditions in a vehicle not equipped to handle them.