

Winter Driving

Frequently Asked Questions

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An early frost not only signals the time to pick pumpkins but also the time to prepare vehicles for cold weather driving. Winter driving taxes vehicle systems and driving skills. Whether you drive in an urban or rural environment vehicle maintenance is cost-effective and ensures vehicle reliability. Drivers who travel in unpopulated areas should also plan for emergencies that may arise.

How should a vehicle be prepared for winter driving?

Most service departments or dealerships check vehicle systems as part of a new car warranty or winterizing program. Such maintenance includes checking the:

- cooling system
- ignition system
- battery
- brakes
- tires
- windshield wipers
- de-icing fluid levels
- exhaust system
- heater
- defroster
- lighting system
- block heater

What should be included in a winter driving emergency kit?

In more remote areas, drivers should consider carrying jumper cables, a shovel, traction pads or chains, an ice scraper, towing cable, flashlight or flares and matches, a candle, blanket, non-perishable food and emergency phone numbers. Take along a cell phone and charger, but keep in mind there may not be cellular reception in some remote areas.

How do you decide when you need snow tires?

The right tires for you will depend largely on when, where and what you drive, as well as your personal level of driving expertise. Most drivers only encounter winter conditions such as ice, slush, or hard-packed snow on a limited basis. With this in mind, good quality all-season tires may serve you adequately.

However, if you live in an area that regularly receives snow or your profession or outside interests, such as skiing or other winter sports, require you to drive in winter conditions, then your vehicle should be outfitted with a full set of snow tires.

How do skilled drivers handle winter driving conditions?

Experienced drivers check weather forecasts, wear warm clothing, and notify people who live at both ends of the trip. When driving on slippery surfaces or when visibility is poor, skilled drivers decrease vehicle speed and increase the distance between their vehicle and the one in front. When driving in rain, snow and fog, skilled drivers set their headlights on low beam because high beam only increases reflective glare.

What's hydroplaning and what can you do about it?

Hydroplaning occurs when the front tires ride up onto surface water. The resulting loss of friction causes loss of steering control.

Hydroplaning can be overcome by easing up on the accelerator and slowing down.

What are the basic driving techniques used for increasing traction and controlling skids on slippery surfaces?

To increase the traction of drive wheels on slippery surfaces during acceleration, reduce power and accelerate gently. To reduce a braking skid that occurs when conventional brakes "lock-up," reduce brake pressure and pump the brakes gently. In a cornering skid, reduce power and speed, (do not brake) and steer the car in the direction you want to go.

What about cruise control?

Do not use cruise control in wet or slippery conditions. Snow, ice, slush and rain can cause wheel-spin and loss of control; and the only way to stop it is to immediately reduce power. However, an activated cruise control system will continue to apply power, keeping the wheels spinning. By the time you turn off the cruise control it may be too late to regain control.

How do anti-lock brakes differ from conventional brakes?

When drivers brake hard using conventional brakes, the wheels lock-up and directional control is lost. Anti-lock brakes (ABS) do not lock-up during hard braking and therefore directional control is maintained allowing the driver to steer around obstacles. Because ABS emergency stopping techniques differ from conventional braking methods, drivers with ABS are advised to practise a few emergency stops. Here's how: Select a safe location. Accelerate to 30 km/h, brake hard by applying firm, continuous pressure to the pedal and practise steering around imaginary obstacles while coming to a controlled stop. With ABS, do not pump the brakes, this turns the system on and off. Also, noise and vibration is a normal part of hard ABS braking.

What is electronic stability control (ESC)?

Electronic stability control (ESC) can help you retain control of your vehicle during high-speed turns or on slippery roads. Expanding on existing anti-lock braking systems, ESC compares a driver's intended direction in steering and braking inputs, to the vehicle's response, via lateral acceleration, rotation and individual wheel speeds.

ESC works by applying the brakes to individual front or rear wheels and/or reducing excess engine power as needed to help correct understeer or oversteer. ESC also integrates all-speed traction control, which senses drive-wheel slip under acceleration and individually brakes the slipping wheel or wheels, and/or reduces excess engine power, until control is regained.

How do you get "unstuck"?

Clear away the snow from around the tires to allow the wheels to roll more freely. If you have a traction device put it immediately ahead of the drive wheels. Gently rock your vehicle back and forth by shifting from forward to reverse, gradually increasing the distance travelled with each rocking motion. Refer to the owner's manual for more information.

What should you do if you're stranded?

Put on warm clothing. Stay with your vehicle. Tie a cloth to the aerial to attract roadside patrols. Call for assistance if you have a cell phone and are within a cellular area.

To prevent deadly carbon monoxide poisoning, if the vehicle is run to provide heat, ensure that the window is down slightly to provide fresh air and that the tail pipe is clear of snow or mud to prevent carbon monoxide buildup in the vehicle. Run the engine no more than 10 minutes each hour to conserve fuel.

How do you attach booster cables safely?

Before booster cables are attached, turn off the ignition in both vehicles, put on the parking brake and shift into neutral or park. Check the fluid level in the dead battery, and if low add water so a charge can be built after the engine is started.

If the following instructions differ from what's in your owner's manual, follow the procedures outlined in your owner's manual.

Basic booster cable connection procedures:

- Attach a red clamp to the positive (+) terminal of the dead battery.
- Attach the other red clamp to the positive terminal of the good battery.
- Attach the black clamp to the negative (-) terminal of the good battery.
- Attach the other black clamp to the engine block or metal portion of the car with the dead battery.
- Once the booster cables are correctly attached, start the vehicle with the good battery. With the engine still running, start the vehicle with the dead battery.
- Detach all cables in reverse order and allow the boosted vehicle to run for at least 20 minutes.

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