

Driving in snow

By Jason Radley

At some time we all have to drive in snow (well if we drive in winter!) here are some tips on how to avoid problems, and should the worst happen what to do if you get stuck in snow



Before you set off – what you need to check

Tyres Check your tyres are properly inflated (check with your car manual) and have the necessary tread depth (at least 3mm).

Battery During winter the battery is under more stress than in warmer conditions and so will run down much quicker. Ensure it is fully charged by either drive a long distance or trickle charge the battery.

Engine To reduce strain on the engine, depress the clutch when starting the engine.

Screen wash Ensure the screen wash is topped up and any anti-freeze additive is included, at the correct concentration.

Fuel Make sure your tank is topped up, should you be stuck you should have enough fuel to keep your car warm and make it home. Be careful though, should the exhaust be blocked by snow noxious fumes may enter the car.

Windscreen Remove all the snow and ice covering the windscreen. DO NOT use water, this can cause the screen to crack and would likely freeze later over the windscreen.

Locks Give the locks a squirt of WD40, this will prevent them from freezing up

Warm Clothes Although it is warm and toasty inside the car, the conditions outside will be very different, make sure you have gloves, hat and warm coat. Along with strong boots.

The driving bit

Remember when driving in snow that too high a speed risks the car going out of control, where as driving too slowly can mean losing momentum when you need it (like trying to get up a hill). Also, use the controls as smoothly as possible. Do not suddenly brake, accelerate or steer, this can cause the vehicle to go into a skid.

When starting off, begin gently, don't use high revs. If necessary start in 2nd gear rather than first (if you have a manual gearbox). Should you find that you do enter a skid firstly take your foot off the accelerator and use steering to get out of the skid. Do not brake unless absolutely needed in order to control the skid and steering out of it hasn't worked.

Your braking distances will be significantly increased (by 2 or 3 times) and so you should leave the needed distance between you and the vehicle in front. Also, your brakes will not be totally effective in icy conditions, do not completely rely on them.

When it comes to your journey, plan the route to take you via main roads where ever possible, these are the ones most likely to have been gritted and be clearer. Try not to use minor roads as short cuts, these are far less likely to be clear or gritted and the risk of something going wrong is much higher.

When driving on motorways stay in the clearest lane whenever possible, and also try to drive in the tyre tracks of previous vehicles which should be clear.

In falling snow have you dipped headlights on, to make you visible to other road users and pedestrians. If the visibility is particularly poor it may be necessary to use your fog lights. Remember though, that once visibility improves that you should turn off your fog light so as not to dazzle other road users.

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