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Winter driving tips

Winter brings sharp drops in temperature, creating road conditions that can be hazardous for drivers. Frost, fog, heavy rain, and snow all increase the risk of accidents.

When conditions are severe, the safest choice is often not to drive. But for many people, using their car is essential, whether for work, family, or other daily commitments. If you are driving, it's vital to understand the risks and prepare both yourself and your vehicle.

Here are some key tips to help you drive safely and confidently in winter weather.

Check the weather & road conditions

Not every winter day poses the same risks. Before setting out, check the weather forecast and traffic updates for your route.

- If severe weather is expected, consider postponing your journey or taking an alternative route.
- Pay attention to ice warnings, especially for bridges, shaded areas, and rural roads where frost tends to linger.
- Use trusted sources such as official traffic websites, weather apps, or local news.

Having advance knowledge allows you to plan ahead and sometimes, staying home is the safest decision.

Dealing with ice

Ice is one of the most dangerous winter road hazards. It's slippery, often invisible, and can appear suddenly in patches.

Clearing ice from your vehicle

During the winter months, you've likely experienced a frozen windscreen. Before you set off:

- Use a proper ice scraper to clear the windscreen and windows.
- Start the engine and turn on the heating and defrost settings to speed up the process.
- Consider using a windscreen cover overnight to prevent ice buildup.
- Never pour hot water on frozen glass, it can crack the windscreen.

Driving on icy roads

Once you're on the road:

- Drive slowly and smoothly in a higher gear to reduce wheel spin.
- Avoid sudden braking. If your car starts to skid, hold the steering wheel steady and ease off the accelerator until you regain control.
- Use fog lights when visibility is low, but avoid full-beam headlights, which can reflect off ice or fog and reduce visibility.

Driving in heavy rain

Rain reduces visibility and road grip, making driving more dangerous. Heavy downpours can also lead to aquaplaning, where your tyres lose contact with the road due to water buildup. To stay safe:

- Slow down and increase your following distance.
- Brake gently and early to avoid sudden stops.
- If you start to aquaplane, ease off the accelerator and keep the steering wheel straight. Don't brake sharply or make sudden movements.
- Ensure your windscreen wipers and tyres are in good condition before setting off.

Driving in snow

Snow can quickly turn roads treacherous. If you expect snow:

- Drive slowly, keeping movements smooth and controlled.
- Maintain extra distance from other vehicles. Stopping distances can be 10 times longer on snow and ice.

If snow is falling heavily or roads are untreated, consider delaying your journey until conditions improve.

Prepare your vehicle & emergency kit

Before you travel, ensure your car is in top condition:

- Check tyres, brakes, lights, wipers, and fluid levels.
- Keep your mobile phone charged and carry a phone charger.

Pack essential items such as:

- Ice scraper and de-icer
- Blanket or warm clothing
- Torch and spare batteries
- Drinking water and snacks
- Warning triangle & hi-vis vest
- First aid kit

These items can make a big difference if you get stuck or delayed in harsh weather.

Winter driving requires extra care, preparation, and patience. By checking the forecast, adjusting your driving style, and equipping your vehicle properly, you can reduce risks and stay safe on the road no matter how challenging the weather becomes.

Have a safe journey this winter.

Better with every move.

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