



Tips for driving in winter weather



As the nights pull in, and with winter just around the corner, we all need to start thinking of the do's and don't's of winter driving. This time of year throws up road conditions that you may not face at other times, and they may require rather different driving techniques.

Perils of wet weather driving

In wet weather, stopping distances will be at least double those required for stopping on dry roads. In wet weather:

- You should keep well back from the vehicle in front. This will increase your ability to see and plan ahead.
- If steering becomes unresponsive, it probably means the water is preventing the tyres from gripping the road. Ease off the accelerator and slow down gradually.
- The rain and spray from vehicles makes it difficult to see and be seen.

When roads are icy or slushy

Icy roads throw up a number of problems, so please note:

- It can take ten times longer to stop in icy conditions than on a dry road, so drive slowly, allowing extra room to slow down and stop.
- Use the highest gear possible to avoid the wheels spinning.
- Manoeuvre gently, avoiding harsh braking and acceleration.
- To brake on ice or snow without locking your wheels, get into a low gear earlier than normal, allow your speed to fall and use the brake pedal gently.
- If you start to skid, ease off the accelerator but do not brake suddenly.
- Ensure you keep as warm as possible, be prepared with blankets or coats.
- If you get stranded in the snow don't leave your vehicle - let help come to you.

Watch out for fog

At this time of year, fog can be a hazard in any region of the country:

- Fog drifts rapidly and is often patchy.
- In foggy conditions, drive very slowly using dipped headlights.
- Use fog-lights if visibility is seriously reduced, but remember to switch them off when visibility improves.
- Don't hang on to the tail-lights of the vehicle in front. This gives you a false sense of security and means you may be driving too close.
- Don't speed up suddenly, even if it seems to be clearing. You can suddenly find yourself back in thick fog.

Flooded roads are an increasing problem

Flooding seems to be more prevalent in recent years and requires good driving practice:

- Don't attempt to cross if the water appears deep.
- Drive slowly in first gear but keep the engine speed high by slipping the clutch - this will stop you from stalling.
- Avoid the deepest water, usually near kerbs.
- Remember - test your brakes when you are through the flood before you drive at speed.

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When you do have to travel by road, please bear in mind the following ten good practice driving tips:



1. Have your vehicle, including tyres, brakes, lights, anti-freeze and windscreen fluid, checked. Clean your windscreen inside and out, and check thoroughly for scratches, chips and abrasions.



2. Use dimmed or dipped headlights as soon as you notice a reduction in visibility. If vehicles approaching in the opposite lane have their lights on, it probably means that you should too, as visibility ahead is poor.



3. Check tyres for condition, tread depth and pressure. If the tread depth is getting low, please get your vehicle tyres checked (at no cost to your company) at either ATS or Kwik-Fit before the onset of winter.



4. Reduce your speed, stay further back from the vehicle in front, drive defensively and allow yourself and others around you more time to react. Your vehicle will take much longer to stop on a wet surface, particularly if covered with leaves or early morning frost.



5. At sunset or sunrise beware of dazzle from low sun. Ensure that you keep your windscreen clean and free from smears. If driving into the sun be aware that drivers behind may be dazzled and may not see you if you stop. If the sun is low behind you, be aware that oncoming drivers may be dazzled.



6. Slow earlier for junctions, intersections, roundabouts and traffic lights so you don't have to brake or corner so hard. Adapt your driving speed to visibility.



7. Pay attention to your windscreen wipers to ensure these clean your windscreen efficiently.



8. Only use fog-lights in extreme conditions, such as when the vehicles in front become difficult to see, and always remember to switch them off when conditions improve.



9. If your vehicle is not equipped with ABS, should the wheels lock, release the brake briefly so that you can steer. With ABS you can 'stomp and steer' – keep your foot on the brake and steer in the direction you want to go.



10. Take regular breaks, even if you're in a hurry. It will help you concentrate better, especially when doing long drives in poor or foggy conditions.

Remember driving during winter requires common sense and a greater awareness of conditions. You should always be prepared.