

What's so different about Winter Driving?



When the snow season comes to Alaska, it's like driving in another world. Suddenly, your car is different. It will not start, steer or stop the way it does in warm weather. The roads often become treacherous when covered with snow. Slush is often as slippery as ice and both are a potential danger to motorists.

Visibility is even affected by winter conditions. Daylight hours are short and the glare from the snow can blind you. In addition, windshields often ice or fog over. The biggest problems with winter driving are often the drivers themselves. Too often drivers are in a hurry. They either don't worry about road conditions, or become tense and nervous when at the wheel.

Below are tips on how to prepare for winter and how to react to dangerous driving conditions.

Planning and Preparation

Since all winter driving problems cannot be anticipated, the best rule is to plan for potential situations and be prepared. Don't wait until the cold weather arrives to do so. Prepare for winter beforehand by having your car tuned so it will run efficiently. This will reduce the chances of roadside breakdowns. The following systems should be checked by a skilled mechanic.

The battery: Cold weather makes vehicles harder to start. Always keep the battery and terminals clean in order to insure good connections, and keep the battery fully charged. Be sure to check the battery's fluid level as well as the voltage regulator. If there is a question regarding your battery's integrity, get a new one!

The ignition system: Check the condition of ignition wires, and check the distributor cap for cracks. Faulty wires or a cracked cap can result in engine drown out when it snows, or when slush is thrown onto the car and into the engine compartment. It is also a good idea to have a tune-up done before cold weather sets in. A tune-up should reveal ignition problems, if they exist.

The heating and cooling systems: Have the antifreeze in the radiator checked. If there is a leak in the radiator or hoses, have them repaired or replaced *before* you add antifreeze. Test the heater and defroster to make sure they are functioning properly. If they are not putting out enough heat, have the thermostat and heater checked. Also, check the intake vents for any debris or other matter that can cause blockage.

The exhaust system: Be sure to have the entire exhaust system checked for leaks. Replace components as necessary. Carbon monoxide is a killer and even a small leak in the system could pave the way to disaster.

Never warm up your car in a closed garage. Even if the exhaust system is in good working order, it's a good idea to drive with at least one window partially open.

The windshield wipers and washers: Check the functioning of wipers and blades. Replace blades that streak the windshield. Keep the windshield washer reservoir filled with a washer antifreeze solution.

The tires: Regular tires should have a good tread for the bite needed when traveling on snow and ice. If you use snow tires, put them on with the first snowfall warning. You get the best traction with studded snow tires, but these tires may only be used during the following times designated by the State of Alaska department of Transportation and Public Facilities:

Southeastern Alaska: September 30 through April 15

Southcentral Alaska: September 15 through May 1

Tire chains: If you prefer to use chains, inspect your chains to make sure they are serviceable. Check the condition of the cross chains. Replace broken links or links that are almost worn through.



Get Set...Then Go

During the winter months it takes a little extra time to prepare your car for safe driving. Totally clear all the windows, the hood, the trunk and the roof of the car of snow and ice before driving. Many persons fail to totally clear off the roof area. Just the movement of the car and stops can cause snow slides onto the windshield or rear window, limiting driver vision. There are many kinds of windshield deicing fluids that can be sprayed on glass to help melt ice. However, these generally contain an alcohol base, which not only melts the ice, but

cools the glass. Subsequently, the moisture in the air may suddenly freeze over the glass surface, obscuring driver vision.

Moisture in the breath of a driver may also cause ice to form on the inside of the windshield. Thus, before using a deicing fluid, warm the windshield with the car's defroster to prevent it from icing over again. Warm up the engine. Start your car and let it idle a few minutes before driving in order to prevent stalling. Make sure you leave the garage doors open while doing so! Then, drive slowly until your car is totally warmed up.

Prevent fogging. While you are warming up your car, turn on the heater and the defroster to prevent sudden fogging when you pull out.

Keep your engine warm at night. It gets extremely cold in Alaska, and many mornings this cold will make your car hard to start. Using a block heater will help make starts easier.

See and be seen. When it is gray or snowing, turn the car's headlights on so that you can see and be seen by surrounding traffic. Keep the headlights and taillights clean for added visibility.

Cold Weather Equipment

Don't wait until it freezes or snows to load your car with the equipment necessary to combat the elements. Put the following supplies in your glove box or trunk:

- ◆ Flashlight
- ◆ Brush or broom for snow removal
- ◆ Extra fuses for vehicle systems
- ◆ A rag for cleaning headlights or the windshield if you should run out of washer fluid
- ◆ Chains for your tires
- ◆ Extra washer fluid
- ◆ Work gloves
- ◆ A small snow shovel
- ◆ A small bag of sand or salt
- ◆ A blanket and extra heavy clothing for emergencies (to include snow boots)
- ◆ Booster cables
- ◆ Non-perishable food for emergencies



Driving on Snow and Ice

- Drive on snow or ice covered streets only when necessary. If you must drive, be familiar with special techniques necessary to minimize the dangers involved.

- Beware of glare. When the sun shines, snow produces a glare, which can be blinding. Keep a pair of sunglasses or yellow lenses in your car and use them.
- Travel at a safe following distance. Stay back at least two car lengths for every 10 m.p.h. of speed.
- Plan ahead. Look out for the sudden slowing of traffic. Plan your own stops; slow down well in advance.
- Brake carefully. Brake only when traveling in a straight line. When applying the brakes, do so gently and release just before the brakes lock. Repeat this process with short pauses between.
- Beware of icy spots. Ice patches are 10 times more slippery than dry pavement at 30° F. *Watch out for black ice at intersections, underpasses, shady spots, and bridges.*
- Negotiate icy hills carefully. When driving up hills, don't slow down or you will lose momentum. When driving down hills, use low gear, not the brakes. If you lose control of your vehicle, head into a snow bank.

Basic Skid Rules

1. Take your foot off the gas and leave your foot off the brake. Make no rapid or sudden movements until you have control of the steering again.
2. Remember, **NEVER** jam on the brakes; rather, gently apply them instead.
3. **GENTLY** turn the steering wheel in the direction you are skidding.
4. **PRACTICE** skids in a large, deserted, icy parking lot. Make your car skid and learn how to control it so that you can do it instinctively when needed.
5. If your vehicle has an anti-lock braking system, use it in compliance with the manufacturer's instructions.

When You Get Stuck, Don't Panic!

There may be times when your car becomes stuck in deep snow or on ice. Below are some tips which should help you get going:

- Clear a path. Shovel out the snow from both in front and behind each wheel as well as from under the car. Front wheels should point straight ahead.
- Gear to go. Use a higher gear so the wheels spin less. Standard transmissions should be in second gear; automatics should be in drive.
- Rock n' Roll. With a standard shift only, roll forward a little, step on the clutch, and roll back. Keep doing this, a little farther each time, until the car is out.
- Once you've got your car out, don't stop!

Surviving a Blizzard

Here is some information which could help you, if you should become trapped in a blizzard.

- Stay in the car. You are more likely to be found in your vehicle than if you are wandering around disoriented in blowing snow.
- Crack a window for fresh air. Freezing wet snow can completely seal out oxygen.
- Beware of carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Run the engine and heater sparingly and only with a window open for ventilation. Make sure the exhaust pipe is not blocked with snow.
- Don't remain in one position.
- Clap your hands and move your arms and legs vigorously from time to time.
- Take turns keeping watch. If there is more than one person in the vehicle, do not all sleep at the same time. If alone, stay awake.
- Turn on your dome light and clear off accumulating snowfall. Both will make your car more visible to working crews.
- Beware of over-exertion and overexposure.
- Do not panic.
- Stay with the car.

Winter Car Troubles

Cold weather will sometimes make your vehicle hard to start. Try these techniques.

1. Push down the clutch before trying to start it. Use neutral on automatic transmissions.
2. Turn off all accessories before attempting to start the car.
3. Check the battery fluid level. If the fluid is frozen solid, the battery is dead and you will probably need a new one.
4. Use Jumper Cables-Carefully!
 - Your battery and booster battery must be the same voltage—6 or 12 V.
 - Attach one cable to the positive terminal of each battery; the other to the negative of the booster battery and to the engine block of your car.
 - Start your car. Immediately after the car starts, remove the negative cables first, then the positive cables.
 - Remember, run the jumped vehicle long enough to charge the battery.

Frozen Car Parts

Often cold weather will cause various parts of your car to freeze up. Here are a few hints to help you with some of the more common problems.

1. Frozen emergency brake: Try to rock it free using reverse. Next time leave the car in park, or in gear, if you have a standard transmission car.
2. Frozen door lock: Try warming the key with a match.
3. Frozen fuel line: Keep your tank at least half full. Add a gas line antifreeze such as Ban-Ice, Heet or STP to your fuel tank twice each winter.
4. Frozen windshield wipers: *Carefully* free them of ice and snow. Make sure you turn them off when you park to protect their motor.

One More Thing:

Wear your safety belt; it could save your life!

