



Prepare For Winter Driving

Adverse weather and longer periods of darkness make driving much more hazardous. Conditions in the UK can sometime be extreme, as we have found out over the last couple of winters, with prolonged periods of heavy snow and floods. The Met Office have already put a warning out saying we should expect more floods as the ground is waterlogged due to the amount of rain we had during the summer months.

There is a lot that can be done before you find yourself faced with having to drive in extreme conditions. The following advice should help you to cope with winter weather conditions.

Many people have no choice but to drive in winter conditions as their livelihood depends on being able to get to clients or work premises, but for many others there is the option to avoid driving when conditions are bad as they can work from home. The technology now exists to have a virtual office so bad weather should not interfere with many office tasks, a little planning now can mean fall-back procedures and systems are already in place before the bad weather hits.

Now is the time you should prepare both yourself and your vehicle to cope with the extremes of weather you might encounter this winter. Leaving it to the day before is too late!

Winter Driving Safety Kit

One of the most important things you can do is prepare a winter driving kit to carry in your vehicle just in case you are one of the many thousands of drivers caught out during extreme conditions. Hypothermia and dehydration are two very real possibilities and you should consider carrying some or all of the following items to help you cope in extreme conditions

- De-Icer spray which will melt ice down to at least -15°C
- Ice scraper
- Road atlas
- High-visibility jacket
- Reflective triangle
- Charged mobile phone and car charger
- Warm coat, hat, scarf, gloves and winter boots
- Dynamo torch
- Blanket
- Roll of paper towels (kitchen roll)
- Some non-perishable food and drink
- Small first aid kit
- Snow shovel

Although a snow shovel is an important item, however its use is restricted to clearing small areas. If you are likely to need to drive over sheet ice or untreated snow for some distance, you should consider including either snow socks or chains, have a look at the information below to decide which is best for you. Also see advice on winter tyres below.



- Snow socks (which fit over the tyre just like a sock!) are quite easy to store in the boot and fit/remove to your vehicle. They are excellent if used over a short distance at low speed (to get you to the main road or out of a car park) and are less likely to damage your vehicle, however it is easy to rip them to shreds if you keep spinning the wheels or drive aggressively or on roads without a layer of snow.
- Snow chains are quite heavy and more difficult to fit/remove. They will cause more damage to bodywork if not fitted correctly especially if there is limited space between tyre and inner wing; however, chains are probably the most effective device for driving in deep snow. **Note:** As a general rule, snow chains are legal in the UK as long as they are only being used on roads that are significantly covered with snow or ice. If the road is not well covered with snow or ice, the chains may cause damage to the road surface and you can be prosecuted for this.

Preparing your Vehicle

Being stuck in a vehicle overnight is a very real possibility for those having to drive in winter conditions. Recent news items have shown people losing their lives in floods; more drivers are likely to suffer when conditions become colder. Following a few basic procedures can make the difference between an uncomfortable situation and a life threatening one!

How clean is your screen?

Clean the inside of windows often as you clean the outside, this reduces that annoying "steamed-up" appearance which means reduced vision and, in turn, increased danger. Eliminate the problem with good quality soft cloths and decent glass cleaning products.

If the windscreen wipers are not effectively cleaning the windscreen, now is the time to clean or change them.

Make sure your washer bottle is filled with the correct screen wash antifreeze. I would recommend protection down to -15°C to cope with the coldest weather.

If when driving in freezing weather your screen wash freezes on the windscreen just stop in a safe and convenient location for a few minutes with the engine running, by doing this you are stopping the wind chill over the bonnet and screen giving the ice time to melt. To stop this happening again, put more antifreeze in the screen wash!

Clean the wiper blade by wiping it with a cloth soaked in windscreen washer solution or malt vinegar.

Do not use the wipers to clear snow or ice from the screen as this may damage them or the wiper motor.

In freezing conditions, make sure the wiper blades are not stuck to the screen before you use them!

Try to clear all the snow off your vehicle before driving as snow can be heavy and will affect vehicle handling.



Lights

Make sure all your lights including brake and both front and rear fog lights are working and clean. Up to 60% of vision can be lost due to dirty windscreen and lights.

Cleaning or simply wiping with a dry cloth or paper towel all front and rear exterior lights and indicators is another must and how can a driver following you be expected to see your car when your rear lights and reflective number plate are coated in snow? Brush it off.

In bad weather remember to clean your front and rear lights (and your mirrors) every time you fill up!

Keep your vehicle battery fully charged

Modern cars are so loaded with power-sapping electrics that their batteries can go flat surprisingly quickly. Short runs of less than 2 or 3 miles with lots of start stop driving and lights on may not give the battery chance to recover.

*Start your vehicle **before** turning your lights and other electrical items on, this will aid cold starting.*

If you have a manual gearbox, put your foot on the clutch before starting the engine, this reduces the effort required from starter motor to turn the engine.

Carry a bottle of de-icer spray in the car for those cold mornings or cover the screen the night before to stop it icing up overnight or better still, put your vehicle under cover.

When was the last time your tyres were checked?

Remember, the only part of your vehicle in contact with whatever you are driving on is your tyres, so they must be in perfect condition with the correct amount of air in them to work correctly. If you must drive through all conditions then winter tyres do have advantages when the temperature drops into the minus figures.

If you have to drive in freezing conditions on country and minor roads which are less likely to be gritted or overnight when the temperature drops well below freezing it may be useful to fit a set of winter tyres. These do work very well when the temperature drops below freezing (they start outperforming normal summer tyres anything below 7°C) and can be cost effective in the long term.

Check the pressures when tyres are cold and don't forget, tyres set to the correct pressure on a warm summer day can lose 10% pressure when checked at 0°C.

Preparing Yourself

The list below starts long before you get in the car to drive; good planning and anticipation can help you avoid getting stuck.



Listen to local radio and TV well before you intend to drive in order to see what the conditions are going to be like.

In very bad conditions, avoid driving completely, unless you absolutely have to make the journey and driving is the only option.

Do not just trust satellite navigation, always carry a road map and know the alternative main road route before you get stuck.

If you know the weather might be bad then leave early so you don't need to rush, and if you are delayed then stop and ring ahead to say you will be late.

Different weather conditions create different hazards throughout the winter and in different areas of the country at different times. A single journey may take us into very different weather, road and traffic conditions. Good drivers are prepared for each one.

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