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Safe Winter Driving

Winter is quickly approaching and thus, another winter driving season is upon us. The following are some tips to help get you home safely.

Winter Driving Tips:

See and be seen

If your vehicle is snow or ice covered, carefully clean all your windows and mirrors before setting out in the morning, and make sure you maintain visibility while driving. Be sure also to brush the snow off your front and rear lights. If you're on a long trip, make sure you clean your lights whenever you stop for gas.

Slow down

Everything takes longer on a slippery surface. It takes longer to start from a standstill, longer to stop, longer to change lanes. Even vehicles with all-wheel drive, which have superior traction when starting, will have trouble when stopping.

So take it easy, and don't try anything sudden. Use limited pedal pressure when starting, don't attempt sharp turns at speed, and begin braking well in advance of where you want to stop.

Make room in front of you.

The biggest cause of accidents on any surface is not having enough time to stop. That goes double for slippery surfaces. When driving on dry surfaces, the rule of thumb is two-seconds between your car, and the car in front of you (no matter what your speed).

Using the "two-second rule," it's easy to determine if you're too close. Simply pick a spot on the side of the road,

and when the car in front of you passes that spot, start counting (one thousand one, two thousand two). If you reach that spot before two seconds have elapsed, you're too close.

But that's in dry conditions. Many driving experts recommend doubling this to four-seconds on slippery surfaces, because when you have to stop quickly on snow or ice, your car is likely to behave unpredictably. If you have more time, you have more distance in which to stop safely.

Change lanes carefully

When it's really snowy, cars travelling down the highway will often cause ridges of slush between the lanes. Changing lanes through that ridge of slush or ice can dramatically upset the vehicle. The technique is to pick your spot (where there's the least amount of slush between lanes), signal in advance, maintain a steady speed, and hold the steering wheel firmly as you cross from one lane to the next.

Watch and adjust for black ice

If you've ever tried to walk on black ice, you know how slippery it is. At speed, cars have very limited control on this surface (slowly decelerating is about all you can do). What keeps the vehicle going in a straight line is its momentum, and not attempting to change direction. Fortunately, black ice typically occurs in specific places: on bridges, on highway overpasses, and in shaded areas. However, ice can be particularly slick on a frigid, sunny day at intersections, where your brakes (anti-lock or not) and steering may have no effect at all.


If you're on the highway and you suspect black ice ahead, take your foot off the accelerator, line the car up, and let its momentum carry you through the slippery area. Coast to a halt.

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