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Gretzky's top 10 tips for safe winter driving

(NC)-Extreme winter driving conditions, including ice and snow, demand that even the most experienced drivers take safety precautions and develop good winter driving habits. Here are 10 rules of the road suggested by veteran snow driver and hockey legend Wayne Gretzky and J.O. Hunt, chief engineer for Goodyear Tires, that every driver should know to ensure safe driving all winter long:

1. When winter weather strikes, SLOW DOWN. Wet, snowy or icy roads offer less traction and make it harder to stop and turn. By slowing down, you give yourself more time and you make it possible for your tires to better use the available grip on the road.

2. Consider buying a set of winter tires. Winter tires are specifically designed to offer more traction on snow and ice than conventional all-season tires. For example, the Goodyear Ultra Grip Ice tire delivers 12 percent better traction on ice than a conventional snow tire.

It's best to replace all four tires with winter tires because differences in tire size and wear can negatively affect a car's handling and stability.

3. Use extra care when driving across bridges and overpasses during the winter. Because they are exposed to cold air and winter winds above and below, ice can form on bridges even when the roads on either side are free from ice.

4. If possible, carry a sack of sand or gravel in the trunk of your car. If your car has rear-wheel-drive, the added weight over the drive wheels will improve traction. In addition, the sand or gravel can be used to help get you out if you become stuck.

5. Because there is less traction available on wet, snowy or icy surfaces, avoid sudden inputs on the steering wheel, brakes or accelerator. Instead, make gradual movements to avoid upsetting the balance of the car. If you feel the car begin to skid, ease off the gas, steer into the skid and look at where

you want the car to go.

6. Ice and mud can build up on wheels and underneath your car. This could cause your wheels to become unbalanced which can upset the ride and lead to unnecessary wear of your tires and suspension parts. Check the wheels and underside of the vehicle often and wash off any mud or ice as soon as possible.

7. If you are planning a long winter trip, be sure to pack extra blankets, water and food, just in case you get stranded by the side of the road or in a snowbank. You may also want to include a few chemical heating packs (available at camping or sporting goods stores). If you do get stuck, stay with your vehicle until help arrives.

8. Before winter sets in, have your cooling system fully checked out. The radiator should contain a 50-50 mix of water and anti-freeze (contrary to popular belief, 100 percent anti-freeze is not better at protecting your engine than a 50-50 mix). At the same time you check your coolant, also have the hoses, belts and water pump checked for wear or leaks.

9. Check your tires for proper inflation regularly throughout the winter. Your tires are the only part of your car that actually touches the road. Proper inflation can make sure that your tires are maximizing their contact with the road. Inflation pressure that is too high or too low can cause unnecessary tire wear and reduce the size of the tire's contact patch, making it less safe.

10. In snowy conditions, check to make sure that your car's air intake is free from a build up of snow. Many of today's cars draw most of the air needed for the engine and cooling system from below the radiator. If this intake becomes clogged with snow, your car could overheat, even on a cold winter day.

Check out www.goodyear.ca for more information on winter driving.

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