

The three "C's" of winter driving

Winter places extra demands on everyone who drives. It's the time of year when our apprehension is heightened in anticipation of snow and ice on roads and highways. And it's a good time to practice the three "c's" of winter driving: courtesy, caution and common sense.

Unexpected changes in road and weather conditions can make things difficult for even the most expert of drivers. One of the most frightening situations is suddenly losing all contact with the road due to slippery conditions.

Even in small amounts, ice and snow make control of a car more difficult and less predictable. Reading the road ahead in winter can often be tricky, even in the best of conditions.

Beware of Black Ice

During the winter months, the

road will usually be grey-white in colour when weather conditions are dry and clear. However, sometimes it may appear to be black, causing you to think that it's just damp or wet. But be careful. It may be covered by a very thin layer of ice called "black ice."

Extremely slippery to drive on, black ice is transparent and forms from condensation or liquid moisture freezing on contact with a cold road surface. It is caused when there is a quick change in air and ground temperatures, usually in the early morning hours in late fall and early spring.

In contrast, regular ice is reflective and lighter in colour. It forms when accumulated snow melts from tire action and subse-

quently freezes on contact with the cold air.

Let Conditions be Guide

Whether it's ice, snow or slush, winter driving calls for extra care. The key is to drive according to road conditions, even if it means you're going less than the posted speed limit.

You should also increase distance between your vehicle and other motorists. It takes three to 12 times more distance to stop on snow and ice.

If your car begins to skid or loses its grip on the road, try to maintain smooth, precise steering. Take your foot off the accelerator, gear down or shift to neutral and apply gradual pressure to the brakes. Steer in the direction of the skid.

Look in the direction you want your car to go. As the car

responds, straighten out the front wheels. Don't jam on the brakes, because it will send you into a spin. As long as the brakes are locked, you have no control of your car.

DO NOT PUMP BRAKES

When you have to stop on a slippery road, do not pump the brakes. Instead, put the car in neutral and apply gentle pressure slowly and steadily.

In general, as you take to the road this winter, avoid abrupt acceleration, braking or lane changes that can result in your losing control on slippery roads.

***Read the road** by looking ahead as far as possible. Keep your distance -- at least three to four car lengths behind the car in front of you.

***Turn on your headlights** in bad weather conditions. Better

yet, keep them on at all times to make your vehicle more visible to other motorists.

***Don't rush.** Allow extra time to drive wherever you may be going. Listen to the weather forecasts. If the weather is bad, stay home.

***Finally, slow down.** Adjust your speed to suit road and weather conditions.

ALLOW YOURSELF TIME

Before you head out onto the roads this winter, prepare not only your car, but yourself. Accept the fact you will have to allow for more time -- both to get ready and to reach your destination. Don't be rushed.

A "winterized" car will help ease your mind. Take time to ensure that key areas of your vehicle have been maintained. Proper tuning of your vehicle is important.

Check your radiator's antifreeze, oil, brake and transmission fluid levels. Make sure you have plenty of windshield washer fluid and gas-line antifreeze.

Try to keep the gas tank at least half-full in cold weather to minimize condensation and gas-line freeze-up. Adding gas-line antifreeze to the tank is also a good idea.

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

Having plenty of gas in your tank is good protection against the unexpected, especially if you travel long distances. For instance, if you should get stuck in a ditch or snowbank, you'll need enough fuel to keep you warm until help arrives.

If this happens to you, stay with your vehicle. Remember to open the window an inch or two and make sure the exhaust pipe is clear of snow to avoid carbon monoxide buildup.

At all times, make sure your lights and signals are working, front and rear, so that you can see and be seen. Check the heating and defrosting systems.

CHECK YOUR TIRES

Use snow tires if the car is not equipped with all-season radial tires. Check the tread and replace worn tires with new ones, remembering not to mix treads or styles.

Don't forget to have an ice scraper and brush, shovel, booster cables, flares, chain or rope and a traction aid such as a bag of sand or kitty litter in your car. It is also a good idea to prepare an emergency kit containing blankets, first-aid kit, flashlight, candle and matches, extra clothing, boots, non-perishable food items like chocolate bars, granola and boxed juice.

Let the three "Cs" be the rule for everyone who uses the road this winter.

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