

Winter Driving Tips



This country's variable weather conditions pose a wide range of problems for road users. In order to minimise accident risk, drivers need to fully adapt their driving to the different conditions. Extremes of temperature (even those experienced in the UK) will soon show up any deficiencies both in your vehicle and in your skill as a driver.

The following tips may help you cope better with the various seasonal weather hazards. However, as we all know, many of these conditions can occur at any time of year.

- [Preparing your vehicle](#)
- [Planning your journey](#)
- [Driving in ice and snow](#)
- [Driving in fog](#)
- [Winter and spring sun](#)



Reduced visibility and slippery road surfaces make winter driving particularly hazardous. Good observation is essential so that you can interpret conditions accurately and adjust your speed accordingly. No matter what the other conditions, if you can't see the road clearly, you will need to reduce your speed so that you can stop within the distance you can see to be clear. This is a simple and fundamental principle of defensive driving.

In winter, road surfaces are frequently covered by frost and ice, but often not uniformly. Isolated patches and certain gradients will remain icy when the other parts have thawed. The good driver will therefore be on the lookout for these areas. If you drive too fast on a slippery or wet road surface your tyre grip will be substantially reduced and the risk of skidding increased.

Remember - it is better to arrive a little later than not at all!

Smooth control is another essential element of safer winter driving. You should always aim to plan your action early and brake, steer and change gear as smoothly as possible so as not to affect the grip of your tyres on the road surface.

In poor weather especially, better, safer driving is about good preparation, good self-maintenance, good vehicle maintenance, the right knowledge, the right attitude and a thoughtful driving plan.

Prepare your vehicle for winter

Have your vehicle fully serviced before winter starts and have the anti-freeze tested.

Check that your lights are clean and working. Make sure your battery is fully charged. A faulty battery will let you down, probably at the most inconvenient time - so if in doubt change it before it fails!

Always keep the windscreen and windows clean and the washer bottle filled with screenwash to the correct concentration. This will prevent the solution from freezing.

Carry rescue equipment throughout the winter:

In the Boot

- tow rope
- spare bulbs
- spare fuel
- shovel
- hazard warning triangle or similar
- spare wheel (with tyre at correct pressure and tread)
- high visibility jacket
- jump leads
- emergency tyre weld (for temporary 'low speed' repair)
- wellington boots or similar

In the Car

- de-icing equipment
- first aid equipment (in good order)
- working torch
- car blanket
- fire extinguisher (fully operative)



BEFORE setting off on a journey during wintry conditions:

Make sure you know and understand the hazards and risks of all types of weather conditions, especially ice, snow and fog - before you venture out.

Short-term weather forecasts are now very accurate, so listen to local/national weather broadcasts and to travel information bulletins on the radio. If conditions are very bad, avoid making your journey unless it is absolutely necessary.

Clear your windows and mirrors completely of snow and ice before you set off. (Make sure the heater is blowing warm air before setting off - it will keep your windscreen clear).

On the road in snow and ice

Hail, heavy snow and rain all reduce visibility - use dipped headlights. Only travel at a speed which you will be able to stop within the distance you can see to be clear.

Driving in windy conditions is stressful and tiring. RoSPA recommends a stop every two hours, for fresh air and hot drinks - but no alcohol. This is just a general guide - the important thing is that you stop before fatigue steps in, irrespective of how far you have travelled or how long you have been on the road.

Keep your vehicle well ventilated. The car heater full on can quickly make you drowsy.



REMEMBER - TIREDNESS KILLS

Always reduce your speed smoothly and in plenty of time on slippery surfaces. Avoid harsh braking and acceleration, or coarse steering.

Slow down in plenty of time for bends and corners. Black ice, caused when rain freezes on the road surface, will make your steering feel light. Respond by easing off the accelerator and being delicate with your steering movements.

To brake on ice and snow without locking your wheels, get into a low gear earlier than normal, allow your speed to fall and use your brakes gently.

In icy conditions, increase the gap between you and the vehicle in front. You may need to allow up to TEN TIMES the normal distance for braking.

Take care around winter maintenance vehicles. Salting vehicles are extremely powerful and travel at about 35mph spreading salt across all lanes of motorways and trunk roads. Keep a safe distance behind them - do not attempt to overtake.

In snow, stop frequently to clean the glass area, the wheel arches, the light and number plates.

KEEP YOUR SPEED DOWN AND GIVE YOURSELF TIME!



Avoiding Skidding

Skidding can generally be avoided through good observation and anticipation - and smooth use of the vehicle's controls. Your risk of skidding increases if your tyres do not have adequate tyre depth. The legal minimum tread depth for cars and light vehicles in the UK is 1.6mm across the central three-quarters of the tyre tread width and around the entire outer circumference of the tyre. If you are unsure about the tread depth of the tyres, get them checked by professionals. You won't want the police to check them!

Faulty tyres could cost you up to £2,500 - per tyre!

Correct tyre pressures are also very important. Under-inflated tyres will increase your fuel consumption. Over-inflated tyres will reduce your grip on the road, making it vital that you reduce your speed.

Skid correction is a complex subject, full coverage of which is beyond the scope of this web page.

Generally however, the first requirement in all skids, is to identify and remove the cause, whether it was too much speed for the circumstances, harsh braking or acceleration, or coarse steering. The appropriate response after doing this will then depend upon the type of skid and whether your vehicle is front wheel, rear wheel or 4-wheel drive.

It is better to avoid skidding rather than hope you can control a skid when it happens. Such a hope is rarely realised.



If you get stuck in a snowdrift

Try to get out of a rut by moving slowly backwards and forwards using the highest gear you can.

Abandoned vehicles can cause problems for rescue vehicles and snowploughs. To ensure that the road is cleared as quickly as possible, you are advised to stay with your vehicle until help arrives. Do not leave your engine running, as this can lead to a dangerous build-up of fumes.

If you have to leave your vehicle to get help make sure you can be seen by other vehicles.

Fog

The ability to see and to hear clearly is vital for drivers to take in information and to be able to make appropriate decisions. Fog is therefore the most potentially dangerous of all weather conditions. Freezing fog - when poor visibility is compounded by the road surface being slippery - is a driver's worst nightmare.

Remember to drive defensively and always to be able to stop in the distance you can see to be clear. If the fog closes in, then lose more speed.

In any conditions of reduced visibility, an accident involving one vehicle can quickly involve many others, especially if they are driving too fast and too close to one another. Multiple vehicle pile-ups reported in the media demonstrate that many drivers do not adjust their driving sufficiently for the conditions.

AVOID DRIVING IN FOG UNLESS YOUR JOURNEY IS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY.

If you must drive:

- Follow the weather forecasts and general advice to drivers through the local and national media.
- Allow plenty of extra time for your journey.
- Check your car before you set off. Make sure everything is in good working order, especially the lighting systems.

REDUCE YOUR SPEED AND KEEP IT DOWN - CAN YOU STOP IN TIME?

- Switch on headlights and fog lamps if visibility is reduced.
- If you can see the vehicle to your rear, the driver behind should be able to see you too. Consider switching off your rear fog lamps because they could dazzle the driver behind and might obscure your brake lights. Switch off your fog lights when visibility improves.
- Use the demister and windscreen wipers. Remember that fog also makes the road wet and slippery.
- Do not 'hang on' to the rear lights of the car in front as you will be too close to be able to brake safely.
- Switch off distracting noise and open the window slightly so that you can listen for other traffic, especially at crossroads and junctions.
- Beware of speeding up immediately visibility improves slightly. In patchy fog you could find yourself 'driving blind' again only moments later. Always imagine that there is a broken down vehicle just on the other side of the fog bank. Could you stop in the distance you can see to be clear?

If you break down, inform the police and get the vehicle off the road as soon as possible. Never park on the road in fog and never leave it without warning lights of some kind if it is on the wrong side of the road.

Winter and spring sun

Winter and spring sunlight can present drivers with an unexpected hazard. The angle of the sun in the sky will frequently be too low for your visor to be able to help. If you are blinded by glare, reduce your speed.

Reduce the effect of glare by keeping both the inside and outside of your windscreen clean and grease free.



Dark lenses (or dark prescription lenses if you are short-sighted) are suitable for combating glare, but all dark tinted lenses should be removed whenever the sun goes in. Dark lenses must not be worn in duller weather or at night as they seriously reduce the ability to see.