Headline: Winter driving puts your skills to test

Deckhead: 10 ways to keep you safe on dangerous highways

Winter-driving season is most challenging to our nerves, vehicles and skills. The scenario is too familiar. Temperatures drop, snow falls and ice forms. It’s a losing trifecta.

Slippery roads cause many of us to shudder behind the wheel. Our familiar commutes just became a treacherous nightmare.

Snow and ice, meanwhile, aren’t the only culprits. Fewer hours of daylight obscure our vision and the sun’s glare reflecting off the snow can have a blinding effect.

Rapidly changing weather conditions make it essential drivers remain alert and vigilant. Here are 10 winter-driving tips to help make the experience safer and less stressful:

* Monitor weather and travel conditions. Know the difference between a Winter Storm Watch and Winter Weather Advisory, and how they could impact your plans. Allow for extra time to travel, wait for conditions to improve or stay home if possible.
* Think cautiously if you must drive in wintry conditions. Make sure your fuel tank is full. Clear all snow from the hood, roof, windows and lights of your vehicle. Clear windows of fog before driving. Make sure the windshield-wiper fluid is full and wipers are in good condition. Turn on the headlights when you turn on your windshield wipers.
* Increase your following distance. Focus as far ahead as possible. Avoid hard braking. It could keep you from sliding into another vehicle or barrier.
* Not all vehicles respond similarly to icy, slippery roads. Familiarize yourself with the vehicle’s braking system, tire tractions and all-wheel-drive systems. Avoid using cruise control in wintry conditions.
* Don’t panic if your vehicle becomes trapped in a storm or snowbank. Avoid overexertion and exposure and stay in the vehicle. Run the motor sparingly and keep fresh air in the vehicle. Stay moving and don’t fall asleep. Stay alert for traffic and first-responders.
* Try to avoid secondary roads and drive with caution. Measure your speed to road and weather conditions. Avoid passing other vehicles when road conditions are at their worst. Bridges, ramps and overpasses freeze first.
* Plan your route and make sure someone knows which way you will be traveling, your destination and expected arrival time, especially when driving long distances. Report a safe arrival.
* Leave room for maintenance vehicles and plows. Remain at least 200 feet behind them.
* Carry a winter-survival kit in the trunk or storage area of your vehicle. Fully charge your cell phone; and always keep a road map, flashlight, first-aid kit, blanket and shovel in your vehicle.
* And most importantly, drive slowly. Take your time. The posted speed limits are meant for dry pavement.

Cutline: SNOW DOWN – Drivers should take extra precaution when driving during a winter storm. Image: fotoyou. Adobe Stock.

**Kicker**

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