

Ottawa Journal ? safe winter driving

Winter is officially here. It's been a relatively mild winter to date; however, there's still a long ways to go before spring will arrive. The winter season can be unpredictable, as we have seen with temperatures fluctuating from week to week and even from day to day. It's therefore, important to always be prepared for harsh winter driving. If we've taken all of the necessary precautions, we can hopefully ensure safe winter driving for ourselves and other motorists sharing the road with us.

One of the most important things we can do to ensure safe winter driving for ourselves is to equip our cars with snow tires. They significantly assist with vehicle handling when the same type, size, speed rating, and load index are used on all four wheels. Transport Canada recommends that if you plan to drive in severe winter conditions, you should install four winter tires that meet the ?snow tire? specifications for your vehicle. This will help you safely control your vehicle.

In terms of other tires, those marked with ?M + S? or ?mud and snow? (also known as ?all season? tires) do offer safe all-weather use for your vehicle; however, they may not always be appropriate for severe winter conditions. Furthermore, wide, high performance tires, outside of those which have been manufactured as snow tires, aren't appropriate on vehicles that will be used on snow-covered roads.

Transport Canada suggests keeping the following in mind regarding snow tires: i) Transport Canada and the Rubber Association of Canada recommend that you install winter tires in sets of four; ii) mixing tires with different tread patterns, internal construction, and size compromises the stability of your vehicle and should be avoided; iii) when a tire wears, its snow traction will be reduced and therefore, tires which have been worn close to the tread-wear indicators shouldn't be used on snow-covered roads or in severe winter conditions; and iv) maintaining the proper air pressure not only extends the tread life of tires, but also improves safety, and reduces fuel consumption (tire pressure decreases when the temperature drops, which means checking tire pressure at least once a month when the tires are cold, preferably once the car has been outside overnight).

There are some other steps you can take to help ensure safe winter driving this season, which include: packing and keeping a winter driving emergency kit in your vehicle; have the battery, ignition system, lights, and brakes tested; check the wipers on your vehicle to confirm they are still working properly; remove all snow and ice from your vehicle before you begin to drive; always allow for extra space to stop your vehicle to account for icy roads; check weather conditions before you depart for your destination; wear warm clothing; and carry a cell phone with you for emergency situations, but never use it while driving your vehicle.

Winter driving can be stressful, but once we've taken all of the necessary precautions, we can feel more confident when we venture out on Canada's winter roads. For more information on winter driving, please feel free to visit Transport Canada's website at www.tc.gc.ca

By David Tilson, MP