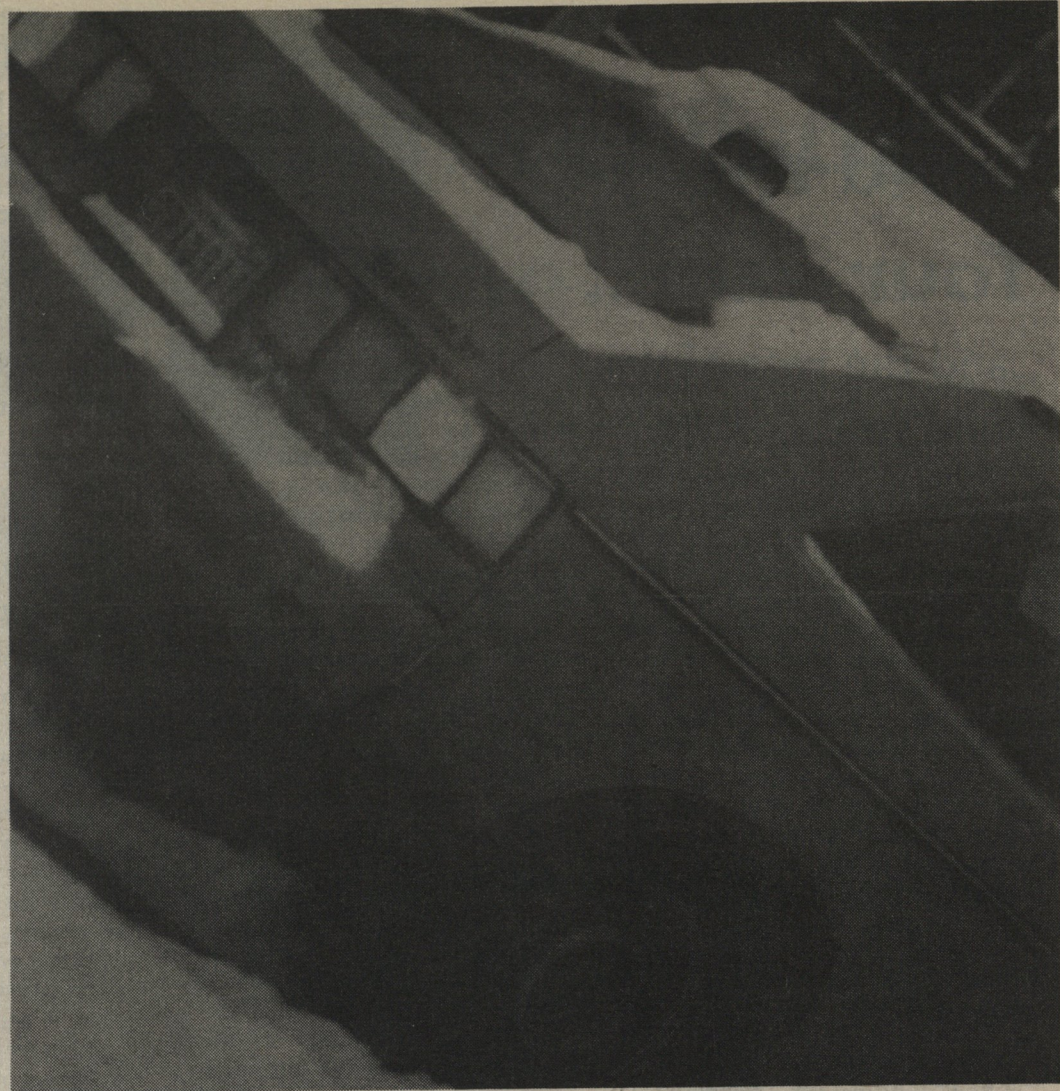


The ABC's of winter driving

By Dave Platt
(The Manitoban)



Winter is probably the worst time for your car. Not only is traction next-to-impossible in some instances, but the inside of your engine is ravaged by the cold. Winter driving can be especially rough on the highway, where the roads are plowed less often and help is harder to find. This article is intended as a checklist of what you need to be properly prepared for the winter months.

Anti-Freeze: Pretty self-explanatory; it prevents the engine and radiator from freezing. Also, use anti-freeze washer fluid for the windshield wipers. See your local mechanic.

Blankets/Warm Clothes: Just in case you get stuck.

Block Heater: If your car was made in Canada, there's very little chance it doesn't already have one; however, cars made in the U.S. might not be equipped with one, so you'll have to get one installed. Essentially, the block heater heats the coolant in the engine block, thus aiding in getting the engine to turn over. Of course, the block heater only works if you remember to PLUG IT IN. See also **Timer**.

Chains: Technically, these are only legal for use in a snowstorm. Once you are able to drive on clear pavement, you are required by law to take them off.

Change of Oil: Get your oil changed from 10 w 30 (heavy) to 5 w 30 (light). 5 w 30 is a thinner oil, which you need in winter. Cold weather thickens the oil, causing it to run

slower. Naturally, the thinner oil thickens less and runs smoother. Again, see your mechanic.

First-Aid Kit: Probably a good idea all-year round.

Gas-Powered Stove: Only if you need to go outside of the city on a long trip. If you are trapped on the highway, this will keep you warm and, in a real emergency, help you cook some food. Keep some soup mixes along with the stove. Bring some matches and candles along, too.

Interior Warmer: A nice frill, but not too necessary. If you keep your car outside, this would be especially useful. Really good ones can be hooked up to a timer so you have the car nice and warm before you even get in.

Jumper Cables: You'll want these, if only to play Good Samaritan and give somebody else a boost. Follow the instructions on the package: negative to negative, positive to positive. Make sure the contacts on the batteries are clean.

Timer: This allows you to start the power

to the block heater whenever you want, which means that you can leave your car plugged in overnight without wasting electricity.

Traction Grit: Provides traction. 'Nuff said.

Scraper/Brush: If you don't have these, get them. Don't trust the windshield defrosters! Some businesses give scrapers out for free with their company logo on them. You might want to splurge on a scraper with a brush attached. Frost Buster is a spray that purports to melt frost in seconds; this might be worth a try.

Shovel: This may not seem necessary in the city, but it is: before the plows get to the back streets, you can just as easily get stuck on your back lane as on the highway.

Traction Mats: Not to be confused with chains; these are used temporarily to get out of a rut.

Another concern is, of course, rust and salt damage. Getting your car washed often (and waxing it in the summer) will do much to prevent this.

A word about tires: it's probably best to get snow tires installed in the winter; however, this can be a big pain, and it's expensive. Most cars now have all-season radial tires--these aren't quite as good, but they'll do.

All the preparation in the world, however, will help you if you drive irresponsibly. The main thing to remember is that you must drive more cautiously than in other seasons. Avoid heavy braking and acceleration; both of these can lead to skids. If you do get stuck, don't spin your wheels; this will only get you further stuck. Since streets are plowed erratically, be especially careful on smaller streets and back lanes. Probably the most dangerous conditions are freezing rain or when the snow has melted into ice. Make sure your brakes are in good working order, and make sure you know how to pump the brakes. (Anti-lock Brakes, while useful on wet pavement, are no better than regular brakes on ice.)

But there's only one way to completely avoid all winter driving problems: stay at home. Chances are, if you have to go out of the house to do something, it's not worth it.