

## **‘DRIVING SAFELY, IN WINTER’**

### **October 2023**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Winter brings additional driving hazards. With planning and preparation these can be made much less of a risk.

These winter driving tips are drawn from the content of our presentations and community webinars. The webinars take place once-a-month, at 10:00 on a Saturday, and last for one hour. If you would like to attend or know someone who might benefit, please email [odfglos@gmail.com](mailto:odfglos@gmail.com)

There are three main elements to any driving scenario which we can influence: driving ability, vehicle preparedness, and journey planning.

#### **1. DRIVING ABILITY**

Whilst mature drivers have a wealth of experience, a decline in driving skills can be quite subtle. In winter this decline can be exacerbated by cold weather and an increase in joint pain and stiffness, impacting mobility and driving ability. A **regular exercise regime and checks with the GP** to confirm fitness to drive are very important.

- ✓ **Eyesight.** Winter driving involves driving in low light conditions. At 75 we may require 32 times more light to see effectively than we did at the age of 25. Regular eyesight tests, at least every two years, are essential. If glasses are required, check with your optometrist if these must be worn for driving. If so, ask for the glasses to be treated with an anti-reflective coating which reduces headlamp glare. If you wear sunglasses these must also have prescription lenses. Keep a spare pair of glasses in your car.
- ✓ **Reactions.** By 65 our reactions can be 22 times slower than a 30-year-old. On wet roads we need to allow even more time to react, at least double the stopping distance than in the dry. Never drive faster than you can see to have time to react to a road hazard.
- ✓ **Medical conditions.** Check with your GP whether any of these need to be reported to the DVLA and insurance company.
- ✓ **Medications.** In winter we may require over-the-counter cold medicines. Check with the pharmacist whether these might make you feel drowsy and ask for a non-drowsy option. Further checks need to be made if there is a change in dosage, or a new prescription is given with a potential negative interaction with an existing medication. Don't forget to mention any herbal supplements you may be taking.

If prescribed a new medication, consider making alternative transport arrangements until you discover the effect the medicine has on you. Never take a friend's prescribed medication.

- ✓ **Mature driver assessments.** If winter driving has become a worry, take a confidence-building assessment offered by organisations such as IAM RoadSmart, [www.iamroadsmart.com](http://www.iamroadsmart.com)  
If you have cognitive or mobility issues, then an assessment should take place at a DVLA accredited Driving Mobility centre [www.drivingmobility.org.uk](http://www.drivingmobility.org.uk)
- ✓ **Highway Code.** Make sure to keep up to date with the latest changes. At junctions' traffic must give way to pedestrians crossing or waiting to cross the road. The Code can be downloaded free-of-charge at [www.highwaycodeuk.co.uk](http://www.highwaycodeuk.co.uk)
- ✓ **Share the driving.** Keep driving regularly and, if a couple, share the driving so you both maintain driving skills.
- ✓ **Sunflower Scheme.** If you have a hidden disability, wear a Sunflower scheme lanyard, and have a sticker on your car. This will alert the emergency services that you may need a little more support. [www.hiddendisabilitiesstore.com](http://www.hiddendisabilitiesstore.com)

## 2. VEHICLE PREPAREDNESS

Many mature driver's vehicles are only driven a few thousand miles a year, so extra-care needs to be taken to ensure the **vehicle's preparedness to drive** if it is not driven regularly. If these checks seem a little daunting, then organisations such as Halfords offer a winter check service that might be worth considering.

- ✓ **Battery health.** Get a garage to check the condition of the battery. If the vehicle is only driven short distances, then it needs to be in good condition to hold its charge. Winter driving places higher demands on the battery with the extra-use of lights, heater, and wipers. Breakdown services report battery failure is the number one reason for callouts.
- ✓ **Lights operation.** Check all the lights are working and are properly adjusted, not forgetting the front and rear fog lights. If the car has daylight-running-lights (DLR), and you don't have automatic headlights, in gloomy conditions make sure to turn on your headlights. The DLR function does not include rear lights.
- ✓ **Tyre condition.** Check tyre pressures at least every two weeks and are at the manufacturers recommended settings. Also check the tyres have sufficient tread. In the wet at 50mph a tyre with 1.6mm of tread, the legal limit, takes 25% longer to stop than tyres with 3mm of tread. We recommend replacing tyres at 3mm. If you drive regularly on ungritted roads and have the storage space for another set of wheels, consider changing over to winter tyres. If that is not possible an alternative are all-season tyres.

- ✓ **Wiper blades wear.** Wipers work extra-hard in winter due to grit from the roads, so check the wipers clear the screen without smears. If they must be replaced then invest in a premium brand, which consistently come out top in comparative tests. When de-icing your car lift the blades to ensure they are not frozen to the screen.
- ✓ **Fluids level.** Check the windscreen fluid is topped up, and with the correct rating for sub-zero temperatures. RAC recommend a pre-mix, effective down to -15C. Most modern cars use a long-life antifreeze but check if it might need changing.
- ✓ **Door seals.** Clean the seals and apply a silicone spray lubricant to avoid the doors being frozen shut.
- ✓ **Windscreen.** Cover the windscreen with a frost guard or apply a pre-icer spray to stop ice forming in the first place.
- ✓ **Visibility.** Check the car has a can of de-icer and an ice scraper. Allow an extra fifteen minutes before a journey to make sure all the car windows and mirrors are de-iced. Use the air conditioning to dry the air in the car which speeds up demisting. Make sure the insides of the windows are clean to minimise headlight glare. Don't leave the car idling unattended - thieves are watching for this opportunity!
- ✓ **Essential equipment.** This should include breakdown service documents, a warm blanket, mobile phone charger, torch, warning triangle, and a high visibility fluorescent bib. Keep a pair of dry shoes in the car so your feet don't slip on the pedals. Also have an emergency car glass hammer to break a window if you get stuck in the car after a collision or in a flood.
- ✓ **Smart phone app.** If you have a smartphone download the What3Words app. This identifies your location by three words which can be given to the emergency or recovery services. This is particularly helpful on roads with few obvious landmarks.
- ✓ **Emergency information.** Have a Lions Club 'message in a bottle' with personal and medical details in the glove compartment to assist emergency services. If you have a diabetes condition, ensure hypo treatments are within easy reach.
- ✓ **Refresh knowledge.** Take time to re-read your car manual to refresh knowledge of how the car's comfort and safety systems function. There may be advanced driving assistance systems you are not familiar with. Also read the latest advice in the Highway Code on what to do if you breakdown. This is particularly important if you must drive on SMART motorways.

### 3. JOURNEY PLANNING

On winter roads **braking distances can be considerably longer**. On wet roads allow double the distance you normally would, and in icy conditions 10 times longer. Also compensate by reducing speeds, making gentle manoeuvres, and allowing extra time for your journeys.

- ✓ **Safe routes.** Use online map services and [www.crashmap.co.uk](http://www.crashmap.co.uk) to plan your route to minimise more demanding roads and avoid crash hotspots. Use motorways or dual carriageways as much as possible - these are the safest classification of roads and are likely to have been gritted. Minimise routes with difficult junctions. The most frequent setting for older driver collisions is turning right at T-junctions.
- ✓ **Safe times.** Avoid rush hours - statistically the riskiest times for mature drivers.
- ✓ **Safe light conditions.** Minimise driving into low sun. At 65 the iris of our eyes can take seven seconds longer to recover than a 15-year-old.
- ✓ **Adequate fuel/charge.** If driving an electric car take even more care to identify where charging points are available. The extra demands of winter driving with heating, lights and windscreen wipers can reduce battery range by 15-20%. With a petrol or diesel car make sure to always have a quarter of tank of fuel in case there are unexpected delays.
- ✓ **Journey alert.** Let someone know if you are going on a longer or different journey than usual.
- ✓ **Never rush.** Allow time for rest stops, or even an overnight stopover on longer journeys. It is better to arrive late than not at all.
- ✓ **Weather reports.** Check before you leave if heavy rain, fog, floods, icy conditions, or snow are forecast. Download the Met office app to receive weather warnings. If there is a warning no journey is worth the risk.
- ✓ **Road conditions.** To find out which roads are gritted look at the Highways gritting map at [www.gloucestershire.gov.uk](http://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk) . To report road condition issues such as potholes, and to see if a report has already been made go to [www.fixmystreet.com](http://www.fixmystreet.com) and enter your postcode, or street name and area.

## Driving safely, in winter, requires **PREPARATION – PREPARATION – PREPARATION**

These winter driving tips are researched and produced by the Older Drivers Forum for Gloucestershire. We are a voluntary organisation supported by Rotary and the Gloucestershire Road Safety Partnership.

To donate to support our work please email [odfglos@gmail.com](mailto:odfglos@gmail.com) for details.  
Thank you.