

Can your car cope with winter's snow

A motorist from northern Wisconsin was passing through Georgia on his way to Florida on a recent winter morning. A snowfall, rare for that area, began to descend. The northern motorist, whose car was equipped for Wisconsin winters, barely noticed the snowfall as he proceeded to his destination. Yet he was surprised to find that the one-inch snowfall paralyzed traffic in the city.

Coming from an area where winter weather is often merciless, the Wisconsinite had learned to cope with any eventuality. Motorists in milder climates are often caught short when an unpredictable winter unpleasantness arises. They skid and slide, and often their cars don't start at all.

Whether you operate a car in areas where lots of snow and cold weather are the winter norm or where fair skies and warmth are the rule, learning to cope is good business.

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Last winter was the second in a row where brutal weather tested the endurance and ingenuity of the motorist in all parts of the country. Record snowfalls turned streets of large eastern cities into ski trails. Torrential rains flooded normally arid regions in the west, and record-low temperatures lingered in most sections of the land.

As a result, car owners in all parts of the country faced difficult times. The cold and the damp contributed to millions of starting failures. The deep snow and icy roads caused countless other cars to be stranded.

Yet other millions of motorists confronting the identical hardships had no starting problems or stalls. Why?

It was undoubtedly more than a matter of luck. The owners whose cars came through were ones who used that pre-winter grace period of moderate weather to prepare their vehicles.

Of primary importance, the copers most likely had their engines tuned. By doing so they purchased sure starting insurance as well as gaining maximum fuel economy and dependable performance. A tune-up, including new spark plugs, is the single most important item to invest in if you desire trouble-free winter operation.

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Keeping a car going on wet, snow- or ice-covered pavement also takes pre-winter foresight. Tires must be in good condition. Brakes, shocks and steering components need attention. Safety necessities like lights, wiper blades, windshield washers and defrosters get a thorough work-out in winter, and they must be checked as well.

Also of key importance in winter weather is the condition of the cooling system and the coolant and the electrical system including the battery.

Anyone wishing to get through the coming fall and winter season with the minimum car-caused inconvenience and the maximum enjoyment of motoring has only one intelligent option open. That is to take the vehicle in to your favorite, trustworthy service outlet for a pre-season check-up.

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Get car in condition before cold sets in

Before the thermometer dips below freezing levels, take advantage of the remaining warm weather to condition your car for the cold months ahead. The Automotive Information Council offers the following tips:

Starting with the exterior of the car, put the high-pressure nozzle on your garden hose and clean the under parts of the car thoroughly. Pay special attention to the fender wells, the door sills and door bottoms where rust can get a head start.

Make sure the under-door drain openings haven't become clogged by the summer's mud or road tar. If clogged, moisture will build up inside the door panels and provide an environment for rust.

Then give the car a good wax coating to protect the finish.

If you spot any paint bubbles or brown blotches, sand the surface gently and repaint the affected areas.

Read owner's manual

Then read your owner's manual, especially the sections on seasonal maintenance. Tire pressure, cooling system care and ignition system maintenance are most important for the upcoming months.

Find an open road or a vacant parking lot and run

the car at various speeds to evaluate performance of the steering, brakes, shock absorbers and front-end alignment.

Listen for unusual noises such as pings, screeches, groans or rattles and look at the color of the exhaust smoke—it is blue or black you could have a problem. If in doubt, consult a mechanic.

If service needed

If service is needed, you should consider a service facility which bears the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (NIASE) or Certified Automotive Repairmen's Society (CARS) sign because the mechanics participating have passed comprehensive tests.

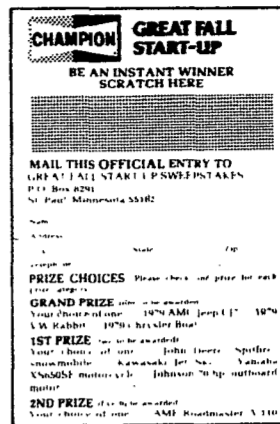
You might consider investing in road-service insurance and acquiring a gasoline company credit card to ease financial worries if you should happen to have a mechanical failure on a trip.

If you plan to drive long distances through the snow belt region, you might want to stock your trunk with safety supplies. These would include a flashlight, blankets, road flares, tire chains and long-handled shovel.

A CB radio may be handy for monitoring road conditions and calling for assistance if needed, says the AIC.

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