

Don't get stuck

These smart steps can keep you on the road during winter's severe weather conditions

BY GORDON CRAIGIE



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Preparing your car for winter may sound like a mundane chore, but its importance will become crystal clear when you're stuck in the middle of nowhere in the freezing cold, all due to something that you could have done to avoid it. Rod Dennis, senior press officer at the RAC (rac.co.uk), tells the *Connection* that the most common causes of winter call-outs are dead batteries, faulty alternators and clutches, tyre problems and accidents.

Many of these problems can be prevented with a few simple checks. The RAC advises that you have your car regularly serviced. The acronym FORCES can help you remember your winter preparedness checklist:

Fuel: keep it topped.

Oil: top up if needed.

Rubber: check tyres and windscreen wipers.

Coolant: make sure it is properly filled.

Electrics: check that all the lights are working and the battery is in good condition.

Screen wash: make sure you have plenty and use an additive good down to at least minus 15 C.

When examining tyres for bulges, splits and general wear and tear, be mindful that although the legal minimum tread depth in the UK is 1.6 millimetres, it is advisable to have at least 3 millimetres to provide the extra grip and traction

required in wintry conditions. Many European countries require winter tyres between specified dates, so if you are planning a European car journey during winter you should become familiar with the specific requirements of the various countries you will visit.

It's also important to keep your car clean throughout the winter months as the salt in road grit can cause corrosion to any exposed parts. Don't forget to thoroughly wash underneath your car when you can to stop salt from settling, also remembering to wash alloy wheels, as the smallest scratch can easily become a large corroded area.

"The most predictable thing about the British weather is its unpredictability," says Richard Gladman, head of driving and riding standards at IAM RoadSmart. He suggests that you always carry an ice scraper, de-icer, blanket, torch, something to eat and drink and a fully charged mobile phone. You may not be able to control the weather, but with a little preparation and forethought you can keep yourself and your loved ones safe this winter. ■

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Prepare yourself

The most critical piece of winter driving preparation is that you, the driver, are primed. Motorist advocacy group IAM RoadSmart (iamroadsmart.com) offers these tips.

Tune in. Listen to police advice and, if necessary, don't travel.

Pay attention. Triple your usual stopping distance, and approach every junction expecting to stop well in advance of signs.

Easy does it. Steer, accelerate and brake as smoothly and gently as possible. Select second gear when you pull away in icy conditions, as less torque will help prevent wheel spin.

Keep it clean. Regularly clean your windscreen and headlights with a clean cloth.

Steady as she goes. Drive at a steady pace; while roads may be gritted to increase traction, some areas may not be treated, which can leave ice patches exposed.—GC

COSTCO CONNECTION

Costco sells a variety of items to keep your vehicle winter ready, such as tyres, car batteries, motor oil, windscreen wipers, screen wash and much more.