

Skating on ice is fun, driving on it is not: are you ready for the challenge?

Some timely reminders to help avoid an unwelcome visit to Mr. Body Shop Guy or Ms. X-Ray Technician

I realize my wife and I are a little overeager to get this “winter” business going. After seven years of cold, rainy Vancouver winters, we are more than ready for snow and ice.

And, our prayers have been answered. Snow and ice everywhere! And while we’ve discovered that skating in a snowy winter wonderland is fun, driving on snow and ice is definitely not.

I grew up in Northern Ontario, and learned how to drive in winter conditions there. But, a refresher course is always a good idea. It’s easy to forget the specific driving techniques you need to get around in the white stuff.

We talked about winterizing your vehicle a little while ago, so I won’t go into that again. However, if you missed that column, and would like the “winterizing checklist,” feel free to email me at pallen@mpi.mb.ca, and I’ll get it to you.



**Road
Wise**

**Paul
Allen**

So, assuming your vehicle is prepared for winter driving, the big question is... are you?

Are you ready?

Obviously, the biggest threat to your safety on snowy and icy roads is losing traction, and losing control. Knowing how to stop, corner, and get out of a skid are absolute necessities if you want to avoid meeting Mr. Body Shop Guy, or (even worse) Ms. X-Ray Technician.

Let’s start with stopping. There are two different techniques, depending on whether your vehicle has an Anti-Lock Braking system (ABS) or not.

If you’re braking a vehicle without ABS, the trick is to apply the maximum braking effort without locking the wheels (threshold braking). If you feel them locking up, ease off and reapply to the point just prior to lock up. As soon as your brakes lock up, you lose all steering ability and traction.

Now, ABS works differently than other braking systems. You must apply maximum braking effort and maintain it. “Hammer the brake.” Do not take your foot off the brake, or “pump” the brakes. So, it’s really important you know which braking system your vehicle uses. Driving a friend’s car home? ASK!

Some people think that ABS shortens your stopping distance. In fact, on gravel, slush, snow and ice, you require a longer stopping distance since your tires will effectively “float” on this surface, carrying your vehicle further along. Keep this in mind as

you’re approaching an intersection or cross street.

Drop your speed

Cornering really isn’t all that complicated as long as you slow down and approach the corner cautiously. And when I say slow down, I mean it. Dropping your speed by 5 km/h isn’t going to cut it, unless you want to wind up in the ditch or as the new addition to your neighbour’s nativity scene.

In a rear-wheel skid, the trick is to take your foot off the accelerator, don’t use the brake, shift into neutral (depress the clutch if you have a standard), look at where you want to go, and steer in that direction. As you straighten from a skid, the rear of your vehicle may begin to slide in the opposite direction (fishtail). Keep looking ahead in the direction you want to go. Steer, quickly and smoothly to direct the vehicle where

you are looking. When under control, reduce your speed, engage the transmission (release the clutch) and proceed at a slower speed.

In a front-wheel skid, you follow the same procedure as outlined above. That is, take your foot off the accelerator, don’t use the brake, shift into neutral (depress the clutch if you have a standard), look at where you want to go, and steer in that direction.

Of course, the first commandment of winter driving is slow down. No matter how experienced you are, sudden and abrupt changes in speed or direction will get you in trouble. It’s your responsibility to drive at reasonable speeds for weather and traffic conditions.

Until next week, be **RoadWise**.

Paul Allen is Road Safety Manager for Manitoba Public Insurance. He would like to hear from you. His e-mail address is pallen@mpi.mb.ca and his mailing address is Room 824, 234 Donald Street, Box 6300, Winnipeg, MB R3C 4A4.