

• The great thing about driving a car in the winter is that it's so convenient. Compare what it's like, being inside a car in December, with what it was like a hundred years ago, being inside a horse. This was much less comfortable and couldn't have been good for the animal. Another convenient thing about winter driving: if you have an attached garage, you can start your car, leave the garage door down, and kill yourself and your entire family. That is, you can achieve the same results as you'd get from a gigantic flaming wreck on the highway without the bother of leaving your house. But the most convenient thing about driving a car in the winter is that you often can't. This is a perfect excuse for staying home and not going to work, and what could be more convenient than that?

If you have to drive during the winter months, it's important to own the right car. Jeeps, Eagles, Blazers, and Subarus won't do. When your brand of automobile is shown delivering Sherpa food to Sir Edmund Hillary during every NFL timeout, it won't be convincing to tell your boss that you can't get out of the driveway. Buy something with no ground clearance instead, like a Corvette or a Ferrari. Probably the best I-can't-get-there winter-driving car ever is the old Austin-Healey with the original exhaust system in place. You can get hung up driving one of those across your front yard in August, if you haven't mowed the lawn in a week.

Be sure to get a car that has no traction, either—something big, with rear-wheel drive and all the weight in the front. Don't get a rear-engined car or a front-wheel-drive car. A car with good traction will go fast on ice-covered roads, and it's obviously dangerous to go fast on roads like that. Also, if you have poor traction, you might go off the road and wind up in a soft snowbank; if you have good traction, you might make it to work and wind up in a hard job. Winnebago motorhomes are huge and have all the weight in the front. Get one of those, and when you get stuck in a snowbank, you'll have a bathroom and a kitchen and it will be almost like staying home in the first place.

But if you really have to get to work in the winter, make sure your vehicle is properly prepared. Don't worry about maintenance, though. Cars are like vegetables: they'll keep indefinitely at freezing temperatures. Especially don't go hosing out your wheel wells because of road salt. Salt causes rust. Water causes rust. So you can imagine what the salt-water you're making with that hose will cause. You do, however, have to make a decision: whether to use your regular tires, which have hardly any tread, or whether to use your snow tires, which

Winter Driving Made Easy

Everything you always wanted to know about surviving the snow season (but were too cold to ask).

BY P.J. O'ROURKE



also have hardly any tread because you were driving around on them all summer. A lot of people are going for the new all-weather tires because you can let them get bald without feeling guilty about not changing them every spring and fall.

Of course, the best choice would be studded snow tires, but the tow-truck and ambulance lobbies have made them illegal in many states. The next-best

thing to studded snow tires is tire chains, except it's impossible to attach tire chains unless you are physically able to lift your car and you have prehensile feet to put the chains on while you're holding the car aloft. The only other way to attach tire chains is to drive your car up on a stump so that all four wheels are off the ground. Then wait for a glacier to come along and knock the car off. If you can't get the chains on and



are forbidden by law to have studded snow tires, you can use four cement blocks to improve winter driving. Put your car up on the blocks and fly someplace where the weather is warm. You can rent another car when you land.

One other possibility is to turn your car into a snowmobile by tying a pair of cross-country skis to the front tires. This has not actually been tried yet, but it sounds interesting. The skis will prob-

ably go around a couple of times inside the wheel wells and make a terrific racket, but once you get moving, your car should behave just like a snowmobile. Which is to say, it will get stuck in a snowbank.

Preparation, of course, is only part of the winter automobile problem. Getting a car started when it's ten below can be even more difficult than getting it off the stump after you've put the chains

on. Some people leave a light on all night in the garage on the theory that it will generate just enough heat to keep the crankcase oil from congealing. This does not work. During a bad cold snap last winter, I left my headlights on all night in the garage and the car wouldn't start for shit the next morning. It is true, however, that congealed crankcase oil makes a car hard to start, so use a lighter-weight oil in the winter. John-

Use a lighter-weight oil in the winter.



son's Baby Oil, for instance. Rub this all over somebody cute, stay home, and forget about starting the car.

Turning the engine over frequently works, too. When the weather gets extremely cold, you should get up in the middle of the night and start your car. Keep it running long enough to get to the airport, and fly someplace where the weather is warm.

Proper use of antifreeze can also help. Alcohol is effective as an antifreeze. Gin has alcohol in it. So does vermouth. Mix eight parts gin to one part vermouth, call your boss, and say you can't get out of the driveway.

You really *shouldn't* get out of the

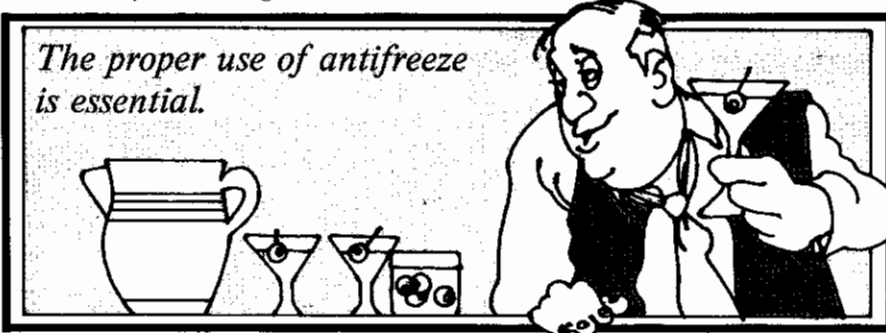
forget this rule. Learn the Bob Bondurant technique for skidding instead. Bob's technique is to fly someplace where the weather is warm, start a driving school, and get other people to pay to learn how it's done. (He tells them to steer into a skid.)

You don't actually have to go to the Bondurant school. You can teach yourself many of the techniques of winter driving. Just cut the brake lines on your car, remove the tie rods, put ice down the front of your pants, and accelerate full speed into a crowded shopping-center parking lot. This will exactly simu-

Jump-starting your car takes practice.



The proper use of antifreeze is essential.



driveway, either. Once you're out of the driveway, winter driving requires all

Learn to simulate winter conditions.



sorts of complex, special techniques. One of these is the foghorn technique such as ships use in bad weather. When visibility is poor, drive very slowly straight ahead and beep your horn three times every ten seconds. This worked for the *Andrea Doria*. Actually, come to think of it, it didn't.

Anyway, the first rule is to go slow. Get up late, have a big breakfast, take a nap, have a second breakfast, call the boss and tell him you can't get out of the driveway after all.

The second rule is to steer into a skid. This is a difficult rule for a lot of people to understand, and I'm one of them. What's that mean, "steer into a skid"? Is it a command? Are you supposed to go someplace and have a skid? Is it a general observation? Does it mean, if you steer then you'll skid? And who's being fooled anyway? If you're able to steer where you want—like "into a skid"—then you're not skidding anyway. So

late driving in the middle of winter on icy roads in heavy traffic. What it will teach you is not to do any such thing.

You may call this an expensive lesson, but that shows your lack of consideration for others. Think how amused the rest of us will be when we read the newspaper story about how you cut your brake lines, removed your tie rods, and drove full speed into a shopping center with a Fudgsicle in your shorts.

Many other winter-driving situations can be practiced beforehand, too. To practice operating the accelerator, brake, and clutch pedals in a great big pair of Sorrels, play the piano in oven mitts. To practice starting cars with dead batteries, take a Sears DieHard into the grocery store, lean over into the meat freezer, and thaw a Butterball turkey by running a twelve-volt current through it with jumper cables.

One type of practice for winter driving doesn't require any physical activity. It's strictly a matter of mental preparation. After all, driving on icy roads has a lot to do with how you think about them, so conceive of a metaphor for icy roads and you'll know how to behave. Think of icy roads as politicians, for instance—crooked, slippery, and treacherous. If you hit a politician on the nose (equivalent to hitting the brake pedal on an icy road), you'll go to jail. If you kick a politician in the ass (equivalent to putting your foot into the accelerator), you'll go to jail also (going to jail is the

equivalent of getting stuck in a snowbank). Using the politician metaphor, wintertime is one long election day. Do what any sensible person does on election day and stay home.

The remaining winter-driving techniques don't have anything to do with driving, because you're stuck in that snowbank. When stuck in a snowbank, use the "cradle" method of rocking the car: rock back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, then stick your thumb into your mouth and cry.

Remain inside your car when you are stuck in a snowbank. This will make your body easier to find later. However, if there is a telephone available within safe walking distance, maybe you should call the AAA. Anybody who does any winter driving should belong to the AAA. Non-AAA towing services are expensive and often don't come. AAA towing services are free and often don't come. Actually, that's not true. The AAA is a very good organization, and they'll come get you as soon as they can in the spring. As good as the AAA is, what's really needed is an AAAA or an AAAAA; instead of helping you get home in bad weather, it would help you stay home in bad weather by bringing some drinks over to your house or would call your boss and say your driveway is a snow-emergency area and the



Should you get stuck, remember the "cradle" method.

Red Cross has flown you someplace where the weather is warm.

Meanwhile, as long as you're stuck in a snowbank, this is a great opportunity to jacklight deer. Build a fire in your car so the game warden will believe you when you say you thought you were going to have to stay there all winter. Jacklighting deer, of course, is only one of the many outdoor winter activities that can be enjoyed with your automobile. Ice fishing is another. Drive your car right out onto the ice. It will fall through, oil and gasoline will seep out into the pond, and in the spring all the

fish will be lying there right on top of the water and you can scoop them out with your hands and not have to fuss with expensive poles and lures. Cars are great for skiing, too. The point of skiing is to pick up girls, and you can pick up a lot more girls if you tell them your car is a Porsche 928. It's all covered with sleet and ice and probably stuck in a snowbank, so they can't tell.

But the very best automotive winter sport is just going for a ride in the country. Make that country Australia. It's summer down there now. And the boss will never find you in Sydney.

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