



Take 5

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U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS/SAFETY CENTER

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An icy introduction to winter driving

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It was well after dark, and I'd been staring at a lot of Interstate 40 West that December day. I was halfway across Oklahoma, and home in San Diego was another day-and-a-half drive. It was time to find a cheap hotel and get some sleep.

I saw an exit ahead and, off to the right, the lights of a gas station. I took the off ramp, which fed onto a street headed toward the town. It had snowed that day, but I was supremely confident that my all-season radials could handle the snow and slush. Growing up in Southern California, I'd never actually driven on snow. However, the sound of it crunching beneath my tires was mildly amusing — kind of like stepping on a bag of potato chips. I was almost to the intersection with the town's main street when the light turned red. I thought about pulling a "California stop" (slowing down, checking both ways for cops and easing through). But, wouldn't you know it, there was a police car slowly approaching the intersection from the left.

I kicked in the clutch and hit the brakes. I was going a bit fast, but I trusted my tires to get a grip so I wouldn't get a ticket. Imagine my surprise as I slid into the intersection, slowly spinning counterclockwise until my rear tires bumped against the far curb. I'd barely felt the "thump" when I noticed the police cruiser through my windshield. In a way, it was hard not to notice it, with its lights flashing and all that. "Great," I thought; between this ticket and the price of a cheap hotel room, I could've stayed in the Hilton back in Oklahoma City. So much for my blind faith in all-season radials!

Since then, I've spent more than five years in Germany and learned how to drive in the snow. However, if you're headed out on the road this winter and inexperienced driving on the "white stuff," check out these tips from the American Automobile Association:

- Accelerate and decelerate slowly. Applying the gas slowly is the best method for maintaining traction and avoiding skids. Also, gradually slow down for stoplights. Remember, it takes longer to slow down on icy roads.
- Drive slowly. Everything, whether it's accelerating, stopping or turning, takes longer on snow-covered roads than on dry pavement. Increase your following distance to eight to 10 seconds to provide more room to stop.

- Know your brakes. Whether or not you have antilock brakes, the best way to stop is threshold braking. Keep the heel of your foot on the floor and use the ball of your foot to apply firm, steady pressure on the brake pedal.
- Don't stop if you can avoid it. It's a lot harder to overcome the inertia of a stopped vehicle than one that is still slowly rolling. If you can slow down enough to keep rolling until a traffic light changes, do it.
- Don't power up hills. Applying extra gas on snow-covered roads just starts your wheels spinning. Try to get a little inertia going before you reach the hill and let it carry you to the top. As you reach the crest of the hill, reduce your speed and proceed downhill as slowly as possible.
- Don't stop while going uphill. There are few things more difficult than trying to get moving uphill on an icy road.
- If you really don't have to go out, don't. Even if you can drive well in the snow, not everyone else can. Don't tempt fate: If you don't have somewhere you have to be, watch the snow from indoors.

For more information on winter driving, visit <https://safety.army.mil>.

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