SGI presents

DriveRIGHT

with *Tim Filazek*

Preparation the key to safe winter driving

The time for summer shorts and sandals is long gone, replaced by mitts, toques, snowpants and boots. And just as you need to dress differently for winter, you also have to adjust your driving habits.

Be sure to wipe loose snow off the hood of your vehicle so that it doesn't blow onto your windshield and obstruct your vision while you drive. You should also ensure that your headlights, taillights and licence plates are visible, and that your windows are completely defrosted before you hit the road.

Not to be forgotten in your winter driving preparations are your tires. If possible, switch to winter tires. Their deep treads are ideal for clearing a way snow, giving you maximum traction and control.

Studded tires are a good choice on wet roads when the temperature is near zero. However, they don't outperform winter tires in freezing conditions.

Regardless of your choice, check the tire pressure often to help prevent a blowout. Your owner's manual or the tire's sidewall will indicate the proper pressure – usually between 30 and 33 pounds per square inch for an average passenger car. Just don't forget that tires lose pressure at the rate of one pound per square inch for every 5º C drop in temperature.

With so much attention paid to winter driving preparations, it's easy to forget about the driving itself. When you're on the road, remember to give yourself more time to reach your destination. Start your trip slowly, testing your braking and steering to "get a feel" for the road.



Once you've reached a level of comfort, you can gradually increase your speed. The key is to maintain control of your vehicle at all times, even if that means driving under the posted speed limit.

To help maintain control, it's important to stay alert as you approach intersections. Scan the road for traction, such as sand or bare pavement, and always accelerate and decelerate gradually.

If you do find your vehicle skidding, remain calm and take your foot off the accelerator. Don't lock the brakes. Instead, brake steadily, look where you want to go and steer in that direction.

Also try to avoid using cruise control on the highway during the winter. Icy sections on otherwise dry surfaces can cause your wheels to spin, compromising your control of the vehicle and putting you at risk of a collision.

Unfortunately, even if you follow the rules of safe winter driving to the letter, there's no guarantee that those around you will do the same. That's why it's important to leave at least a three-second following distance between your vehicle and the one in front of you. If the driver ahead of you suddenly brakes, you'll have the time and space needed to stop safely, ensuring that you and everyone on the road arrives at their destination safely.

Do you have a driving tip you would like addressed in this column? E-mail your question or concern to communications@sgi.sk.ca.