

Spring driving tips

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With winter fading into the background and better weather all around you'd think the roads would finally become safer. This isn't always the case... spring showers bring May flowers and the after effects of winter weather – potholes and uneven pavements.

Springtime driving

If you're using winter tyres, ensure the average temperature stays above 7° C before removing them.

The warming weather brings more dangers to look out for:

- **Cyclists and motorcyclists** will be venturing out more as the weather warms. Being aware of and respecting our 2- wheeled folk is an important part of safe motoring. When overtaking a cyclist leave at least a metre of distance.
- **Children** – the rising temperatures will cause them to come out more. Slow down and pay very careful attention in residential and school zones. School kids are easily distracted and don't always notice traffic. Be alert for teenagers who tend to be fixated on pretty much anything other than traffic.
- **Animals** – as they come out of their long winter hibernation they will be on the move as they forage for food. Being prepared for this can help prevent animal deaths and damage to your vehicle. Slow down in rural areas or where animal traffic is high, e.g. through wooded areas.

Pollen and the ensuing hay fever can be overwhelming and frustrating for some people. Streaming eyes, incessant sneezing and a permanently runny nose are not conducive to being an observant driver. Take care to keep up to date with your local pollen counts and medicate accordingly. Be aware, a lot of over-the-counter allergy medication can affect your driving and concentration. Read the guidance notes of any medication in case it impacts your ability to drive. Remember if you sneeze at 70mph you lose vision for as much as 100 metres.

Road surface changes

The wide fluctuations in temperatures and freeze-thaw cycles that occur at this time of year cause potholes to form. Stay well back of the vehicle in front; more space means more vision to observe potholes and other road surface dangers. Staying farther back from the vehicle in front of you will also reduce your chances of being hit by kicked-up stones.

- Springtime by no means guarantees warmth, which means the combination of warmer days combined with nights below zero can result in melting and refreezing. If you notice wet-looking roads and temperatures have dropped below freezing, expect ice and slow down
- Spring wreaks havoc on gravel shoulders. They can be much softer than usual from all the rain. Coupled with that winter erosion, gullies can form on the shoulders
- Heavy spring rains coupled with meltwater can cause localised flooding. When encountering a flooded road never try to cross the flooded section as the roadway under the water could have been washed out. Instead, turn around and look for an alternate route
- Rural municipalities tend to use a lot of sand mixed with salt to increase traction on snowy roads. Any residual sand will act as tiny ball bearings under your tyres causing a noticeable reduction in grip. Look where you want to go, slow down and expect the road to be slippery from sand.

Distractions

Driver distraction is a leading cause of traffic crashes. It is so important to remember to stay focused on the task of driving and let your passengers enjoy the sights, sounds and smells of spring in safety.

Spring car care

A clean car is a happy car! After a long winter, now is the time for a spring clean. A thorough clean will help to maintain the car's value and reduce the risk of long-term corrosion damage. The inside of the car may have remained damp through winter while the underside is likely to be caked in salt soaked mud which will corrode if left.



Interior

It's quite hard to ensure the interior is fully dry over winter as the constant stream of wet shoes/clothes bring moisture that never has time to dry. Discoloured upholstery, rotted carpets and general shabbiness can seriously reduce a car's resale value.

Take out loose mats before vacuuming the carpets. If required, shampoo the carpets too but avoid using too much water and ideally choose a warm sunny day to aid in drying.

Wet patches under the carpets are a sign of rainwater penetration.

This can lead to serious corrosion so should be investigated thoroughly. You'll probably need expert help, as the point of water entry can be difficult to find.

Accessory shops are full of cleaning products for upholstery, trim and roof linings, but make sure you use the right product for each material. Always do a test on a small patch first to avoid mistakes.

Interior glass and painted metal surfaces need only a wipe over with clean water and chamois leather.



Exterior

Remove winter grime from paintwork with a jet wash followed by warm water and a suitable shampoo. Start on the roof and work your way down and around the car, allowing stubborn dirt at the bottom to soak. Pay particular attention to the undersides of doors and sills and make sure that all the shampoo is fully rinsed off before drying the car.

Attend to minor areas of corrosion, stone chips etc. as they will only get worse if left. Areas of extensive corrosion are best left to the experts. Stone chip touch up kits are available from most accessory shops, it will take a little time but you should get a reasonable finish.

Polish is good as both a paintwork protector and will also help restore any loss of gloss on older vehicles.



Underneath

The underside of the car takes the worst of the winter weather. Mud soaks up salt laden spray and, if left, will cause corrosion over time.

Hose down the entire underside of the car, paying particular attention to the front and rear wheel arch areas.

When dry check for signs of damage to the under body sealing compound. DIY products are available but if you are at all unsure, it's best to get a garage to deal with it. The terms of any long-term anti-corrosion warranty might specify how such repairs should be carried out. If in doubt check with your dealership.



Tyres

Check tyres carefully for tread and general condition, know the correct tyre pressure for your car, try and check them fortnightly. The legal minimum tread depth is 1.6mm, but we recommend replacing them before the tread gets down to 2mm. Not sure about depth? Try the 20 pence test; place a 20p into the main tread groove of your tyre. If the outer rim of the coin is obscured then your tread depth is above the legal limit. However, if the outer rim is visible your tyres may be illegal and need to be checked immediately. Remember to look for faults such as cuts, splits or bulges too and have any damaged or worn tyres replaced. Don't forget the spare.

