



Get ready for winter driving

By Sam Morishima
Contributing Editor

This is part three of preparing for a fun first day. So if you have read the last two issues of *SSN* on getting ready through exercise, protecting your skin, eyes and head, keeping the right body temperature by properly dressing, then you are now ready to prepare your car for the snow trip.

Interestingly enough I am writing this from a condo next to Heavenly ski resort in blizzard like conditions.

We arrived after delaying our snow vacation a day due to the winter storm that made the road uncomfortable to travel on. Good thing I called ahead and spoke to the condo manager who advised us to stay in Sacramento and enjoy a good meal there, because five feet of snow was covering the parking area - no sign of any snow removal equipment!

Viewing the web cameras on www.endlesslope.com showed lines of parked cars on the road to South Lake Tahoe at Myers, further reinforcing our decision to not travel on the mountain road that day.

So leaving the next day was a wise choice as the day was still cloudy, but there were no 50 mile per hour winds and snow slashing down on us as we tried to desperately attach tire chains in the freezing cold.

So lesson one is call ahead. Check weather reports; use the technologies available such as Internet sites with the latest road conditions, weather forecast, satellite views, etc. to view the latest and forecasted weather and road conditions.

This will help make your decision as to whether to travel or avoid impending situations.

OK, so you're going to travel during the winter.

We need to focus on our vehicle. If you have the latest in an all terrain type vehicle I can save you some reading here and you can skip this section and move directly to tire chains.

But for us who have transportation that has lost its new car smell and requires a bit more attention, you need to read this carefully.

Check the following:

Cooling system - Check the antifreeze/coolant level and that they will provide adequate freeze protection.

Brakes - have the brakes checked.

Battery - Check to see if it is near the end of its warranty. Check the battery cables and that the battery cable connection are tight and corrosion free.

Windshield wipers - Change the wiper blades if worn or cracked and refill the wiper fluid. Make sure you use wiper fluid that is made for cold. They contain solvents that will not freeze in most

winter driving conditions. Or add special solvents to your windshield washer reservoir to prevent icing. Do not replace with water, as it will freeze.

Inspect the engine hoses and belts for cracks, soft spots or bulges.

Defroster/heater - check to make sure they are in working order.

Head lamps - Check the car's headlamps, taillights and the interior lights making sure they all work properly.

Exhaust system - Check they are working properly.

Check your tires. Make sure they are properly inflated and the tread is in good condition. Don't forget to also check the spare.

Tire chains - Regarding tire chains - you must carry them or similar traction devices. This goes even if you have four-wheel drive. In fact, you have to have chains on all four tires if required to put on chains.

Make sure they are the proper size for your tires and are in working order. I suggest very strongly rehearsing putting them on at home so you know how to install them quickly and easily as well as checking for the fit and if there are any damages to the links and attachments.

Trying to figure them out on the side of the road in freezing, wet weather can make you very cranky as well as be quite hazardous.

Take along a flashlight and chain repair links. Chains must be installed on the drive wheels. Make sure you know if your vehicle is front or rear wheel drive because you will need to put the chains on the wheels that are driving the vehicle.

If using all four wheels as drive, you need to put the chains on all four tires. Other things I like to have are light thin rubber gloves that I can easily manipulate to hook attachments on the tire chain, knee pads so my knees don't get soaked and a plastic or

waterproof pad if I have to lay down on the snow trying to figure out why the chain doesn't fit over the tire.

An old, not so important, water-proof jacket and over pants to wear when out in the wet and cold putting on the chains is also helpful.

We also carry a couple of two-way radios - one on me when I am changing the tire - and the other for my wife.

As she sits warmly and patiently in the drivers seat, I can communicate to her when to move the vehicle forward or back to either position the tires or to loosen any existing slack so I can tighten the chains.

With the two-way radio, she doesn't have to roll down the widow or open the door to hear me and stays nice and cozy in the car while I brave the elements.

By the way - she can also put on chains and has done so before we met - but for some reason I always lose the toss and is the one that ends up with dirty jacket sleeves and cold hands.

Another helpful item to have is plastic bags to put the wet jacket and over pants in, not to mention the tire chains after I take them off.

This way you don't have to fuss with trying to cram the wet dirty chains bag back into the original case.

A towel or wipes are a good thing to have ready to clean yourself off after putting or taking the chains off.

A possible alternative is to carry \$40 to have the chains put on and \$20 to have them removed by the chain gang.

Remember, when you are mouthing the words "how much is it to put on my chains," from inside the comfort of your car to the person in the rubber rain gear outfit standing in the slashing rain/snow/sleet freezing weather.

If they raise more than one finger you have to multiple the fingers by 10 to get the dollar amount they are charging.

If it is just one finger they raise it will either mean \$100 or they don't like you - depending upon the finger that is being raised.

You may also want to carry extra chain money in case prices go up further during demanding times.

Another good thing to have is an extra car key attached outside the car hidden in a secure place just in case you lock yourself out when putting on the chains or negotiating the price further.

For emergency carry a tool kit that includes at least a screwdriver, pliers and adjustable wrench.

Also carry highway safety flares and/or markers with reflectors and a battery jumper cable.

If you don't have a garage to park your car in when up in the snow then make sure you have an ice scraper or commercial deicer, a broom or brush for brushing snow off your car, a shovel to free your car if you get "snowed in," and sand or burlap for traction if your wheels should become mired in snow.

Hand wipes are great too and carry a first aid kit especially antibiotics and Band-aids when you scrap or cut your hands. I have most of these things in a duffle bag in my trunk and call it my "winter emergency kit."

In addition, take along water and a thermos of your hot beverage, non-perishable food, blankets, extra clothing, battery powered radio with spare batteries, a portable DVD player, and a good book. You'll

appreciate them during any lengthy weather or road delays.

Also, make sure your cell phone is fully charged.

Now if there is room for you, your passengers, your ski/snowboard equipment and the all the rest of your gear then you may just be ready to take your trip.

Did I mention don't forget your season pass and to arrange for pet care?

Drive safe and be courteous on the road. It might be me in the other car.

Sam Morishima is a contributing editor for Sierra Ski News and director of SnoZone, a ski & snowboard school offering lessons on an "Endless Slope."

For more information, visit www.endlesslope.com, or call SnoZone at (916)736-0432.

Training Tip
Listen to your body, not your mind, while skiing. It's tempting to want to get those last few runs in, but tired legs can result in accident or injury.

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