



Is Your Car Ready for Cold Weather?

The changing season and dropping temperatures signal it's time to ready your car for winter. With proper maintenance, you can keep your car running smoothly through the harshest winter. Help ensure your winter travels are breakdown free by inspecting and servicing the following systems and components.

Cooling System: Even in the coldest temperatures, an improperly maintained cooling system can overheat. Make sure your radiator is filled with at least a 50/50 mix of antifreeze and water to provide protection against below-zero temperatures. You may also want to have your cooling system pressure tested by a mechanic. A pressure test will alert you to a leaking radiator cap, faulty thermostat or cracked hose.

Wipers and Washer Fluid: It's a good idea to replace wiper blades every six months. If you need new blades, consider replacing them with winter blades. Keep the washer reservoir filled with freeze-resistant washer fluid.

Heater and Defroster: Verify that your heater system is working correctly, that the blower works at all speeds and the defrosters are functioning. When working properly, these components will help rid your windshield of ice and condensation. Keeping your windows clean will improve visibility and reduce the likelihood of foggy glass.

Battery and Electrical System: Extremely cold temperatures can reduce battery life and starting power by up to 50 percent. Have your battery and charging system checked by a mechanic to make sure it's functioning at peak efficiency. Also, make sure your battery connections are free from corrosion.

Exterior Lights: Verify that all exterior and interior lights are working properly. Don't forget to check the hazard lights. Promptly replace any burned-out bulbs.

Engine Oil: If you live where temperatures regularly drop below freezing, you may want to switch to thinner, "winter weight" oil. For instance, if you run 5W-30 grade oil in the summer, you may want to move to 0W-20 when changing your oil for the winter. Refer to your owner's manual for vehicle-specific recommendations.

Tires: Worn tires can easily lose their grip on slippery roads. Make sure your tires are properly inflated and have sufficient tread and replace worn tires. Better yet, exchange them for a set of winter tires, which have tread patterns and rubber compounds that provide improved traction in extreme winter driving conditions.

Brakes: The braking system is your vehicle's most important safety item. Worn brakes require longer stopping distances and can cause the car to pull to one side when stopping. A mechanic can check your brake pads and rotors for excessive wear and make any necessary repairs.

Full Tank: Keep the gas tank at least half-full to decrease the chances of moisture forming in the tank or fuel lines and possibly freezing (the less fuel in the tank, the higher the chance for condensation to form). For severe cold spells, consider adding fuel system antifreeze to your tank when you fill up.

A little preparation and maintenance can go a long way toward keeping your car running smoothly during the winter months. Know your limitations before attempting to service your vehicle. If you are uncomfortable checking or servicing your vehicle yourself, take your car to a trusted mechanic.

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