



# Drive with confidence

*'Tis the season  
for snow...  
snow tires, that is!*

**W**inter tires are garnering a lot of attention recently. They're selling fast... and there are a few very good reasons why you may want to get in on the action.

Winter tires have been available to the general public for many years. Major tire companies started advertising them as early as the 1920s for added traction in snow and ice conditions. Many people were also becoming accustomed to putting a webbing of chains on their tires to increase traction.

In the 1960s, winter tires were introduced with safety spikes, or studs, to help grip ice and snow even better.

With the introduction of all-season tires in the 1970s, many people no longer felt the need to have two sets of tires that they had to change over twice a year. The sale of snow tires slowed.

But now, more than 30 years later, advanced tire technology has given people new reasons to invest in a dedicated winter

tire for traction control through snowy weather conditions.

In the province of Quebec, a law was recently passed that makes winter tires mandatory. At the time of this writing, it remains the only province that has such a law... but other provinces are considering it.

A winter tire is beneficial in cold temperatures for a couple of reasons. The biggest one is that when the temperature falls to below 7°C, the rubber composition in an all-season tire starts to lose its elasticity. The vehicle handling as a result, is greatly compromised. Winter tires feature a rubber composition that's softer, helping it stick to the road better.

Your stopping power in winter conditions will increase as much as 25 per cent with cold-weather tires, compared to all-season tires. Overall, you will see a 30 to 50 per cent increase in traction with the use of winter tires in severe snow conditions.

In addition, the tread designs of winter

tires are generally more aggressive. They're designed to cut through snow and slush more efficiently than regular all-season or summer tires.

On the downside, the more aggressive the tire, the more noise it will make on the road. It'll be a noisier ride, but it will be safer.

When shopping for a winter tire, there are a few things you have to know up front. The



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most important fact to have ready is the size of the tire you're looking for. It will be on the side of your tire, consisting of seven numbers and a couple of letters. It will normally start with P or LT. If you have trouble locating it, any tire retailer would gladly help you out.

Always buy four winter tires, not just two. They should all be of the same tread design and sizes.

You should also be aware of the time of year that you're shopping, as this will greatly affect availability. While all season tires are made in the tire factories pretty much all year round, winter tires and ice tires are only made for a short period of time in late summer. If you finally decide to purchase winter tires in February, many times you'll find there are few or none left.

Other important things to consider include the option of studded tires - if they're allowed in your area - and if you need better traction in snowy conditions or are prone to traveling on slippery roads. Many parts of Canada have banned studded tires due to the amount of damage they can cause to roadways. Be sure to check your local laws before investing in them.

If you drive a lot, like commuting a great distance to work every day, you'll want to get a higher-end tire, so that you'll get not only maximum traction, but maximum durability.

This is also a great time to purchase a set of dedicated winter rims. Winter rims are generally a plain black steel wheel. Your snow tires will be mounted on them only once, and storing the winter tires will include the wheels. They're an investment initially, but they'll save installation costs every year. Plus, there's the added benefit that your factory alloy rims will be less vulnerable to damage

when not exposed to the severely corrosive elements. Salt, sand, and slush can cause pitting of the alloy over a period of years, and a set of steel winter rims will pay for themselves in just a couple of winters, when factoring in the installation costs.

Keeping the steel winter rims clean is fairly easy despite the elements they're exposed to. Spray them down once in a while and give them a good polish before storing them for the summer.

Whatever you have on your car, though, whether it's snow tires or all-seasons, be sure to keep the back of the rims clean and free of snowy buildup. The added weight can cause a balance problem that translates to unwanted vibration.

The most important thing you can do to take care of your winter tires is make sure you only use them during the cold-winter months. Because of their softer compound, they'll wear out faster than traditional all season or summer tires when used in the warmer months. They were made to grip snow and ice; warmer weather will shred the rubber.

Install them at the first sign of snow, and take them off at the first sign of spring.

To make them last even longer, make sure they're properly inflated. Check them monthly, as this will help ensure maximum tire life, provide the best handling, and give you the best fuel economy. Remember, the weight of your vehicle rides on only five per cent of the tire. The other 95 per cent of the weight rests on the air in the tire, so full and proper inflation is critical.

Being prepared for winter driving starts with preparing your vehicle for winter, and winter tires are an excellent part of your winter maintenance program. ■

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