

# Ranch Estates Winter Driving Tips, Recommendations and Driving Techniques

The challenge of living anywhere in the mountains can be enjoyable but you **MUST** have the right clothing, equipment and know proper winter driving skills. **YOU WILL BE TESTED**, so you should **ALWAYS** be prepared!

## ITEMS FOR THE VEHICLE

These are **ALWAYS** required for safe winter driving and survival, have them in each of your vehicles:

- 1) **PROPER VEHICLE**- 4x4, All wheel drive vehicle (front wheel drive can work).
- 2) **"WINTER TIRES" or "OFF-ROAD TIRES"**. Don't fool yourself, these are a must! You may think these are expensive or overkill but fixing your car after crashing into the ditch costs more and is more time consuming to have it fixed.
- 3) **Winter SLEEPING BAG** or heavy wool blankets kept inside the car in case you become stranded and have to spend the night in the ditch. It takes an average of 3 or 4 hours for a wrecking crew to get out to remote locations. During blizzard conditions it can be a lot longer. Stay with your vehicle, a blizzard can disorientate you in even the shortest distance to walk. Your vehicle offers your best chance of survival.
- 4) **Warm MITTENS, HAT/** balaclava, heavy **WOOL SOCKS** with winter/ insulated **BOOTS**. The first things to become frost bitten are your nose, fingers and toes. Always have these along.
- 5) **TIRE CHAINS** or a bag of "cat litter" or large container of sand mixed with rock salt. These work wonders if you become stuck.
- 6) **SHOVEL**, the army surplus store has folding/collapsible shovels for around \$10.00. These are perfect!
- 7) **WATER and FOOD** snacks for energy and warmth. Ranch Estates is located at 9,000 feet. It does not take long to use up your energy and dehydrate, especially if you are working to unstick a vehicle.
- 8) **CANDLE with MATCHES**, this can create enough heat inside a vehicle to help make a sleep over at least semi-comfortable. **REMEMBER** to crack a window for ventilation.....candles and

YOU both use oxygen. If the candle will not stay lit, you need to ventilate the vehicle immediately!

9) **CELLULAR PHONE** with vehicle adapter for charging. Cell phones do not always have coverage here in the mountains but are an easy way to get help on their way to you. As a precaution, always let someone know where you are heading, your route, and ETA.

10) **JUMPER CABLES, FLASHLIGHT and a TOW STRAP**. Road flares are a good idea also because in extreme situations they can be seen for miles and are easy to make a fire with.

## WINTER DRIVING TECHNIQUES

\*\*\*\*Be sure that YOU fully understand how to activate and employ your 4x4 or ALL-wheel drive vehicle. Do NOT wait until you are stuck to try and figure out its proper operation.

\*\*\*\*It is a good idea to put your "WINTER TIRES" on during the last week of October at the latest. Woodland Park usually gets at least a foot of snow by the end of October.

Driving in the snow can be "no worries" if you have a proper understanding of winter driving and its techniques. Two rules you MUST always remember are;

1) **NEVER "TURN" AND "BRAKE" AT THE SAME TIME!** This will cause you to lose control of your vehicle. Brake to slow down before you start to turn the vehicle.

2) Colorado driving rules state that when two opposing vehicles meet on a hillside road, **the vehicle going "UPHILL" has the right of way!** The reason being that the vehicle going downhill has gravity on his side and it is much easier for the vehicle heading downhill to regain momentum due to gravity pulling him downhill.

\*\*\*\* **When descending a hill in the mountains, you should ALWAYS shift the vehicle into a lower gear....even in the summer time.** The switchbacks here in Ranch Estates are very steep and in order to stay in control of your vehicle during snow and icy conditions you must shift your vehicle into "FIRST" gear and allow the vehicle to "slowly descend" as you steer it through the turns of the switch-backs. **This lets the car's engine do the 90% of the braking for you.**

When roads are slick you must do everything gently. Accelerate slowly. Brake gently. Turn gently. Sudden changes cause the tires to lose their grip on the road; the result is loss of control. As you begin to move, accelerate gently so that your tires don't spin. If you stomp it down, your tires will spin out and burn a hole but you won't move much. When braking, if you hit it hard, the tires lock up and you not only don't stop but you lose steering control. This is the thing that gets inexperienced drivers every year at the first snowstorm. Don't freeze up on the brakes! If you feel traction break let up then brake again more gently. The trick is to brake just hard enough that you don't lose traction. When approaching a planned stop, such as a stop sign, slow down well in advance to avoid the need for heavy braking.

Now, let's talk about skids. A skid is caused when the drive wheels lose their traction. Or even worse when all wheels lose their grip. In a skid you have to do some immediate remedial

steering. Steer the car in the direction you need to go to stay in your lane. At the same time you need to correct the condition that caused the skid. Too aggressive acceleration will cause the drive wheels to spin and put you into a skid. The remedy here is to let off the gas enough to let the tires regain traction. Be careful not to let off so much that the engine slows the tires to the point of going too slow or that will cause a skid also.

Letting off the accelerator too quickly may cause the car to skid. The remedy here is steer, and at the same time gives it a little more gas. Avoid the impulse to hit the brakes as this will compound the problem, and may send you into a spin. Correct a skid with judicious use of the steering wheel and accelerator.

Four wheel skids are usually encountered when you go into a curve moving too fast. These are very scary if you are turning toward the right because you begin to move out of your lane into the lane of oncoming traffic. In this case ease off the accelerator and steer gently toward your lane. At first you won't get any response from the steering wheel, but as the car slows the steering will respond. If you save it, take a deep breath and slow down. Four wheel skids are also caused by heavy braking. Be gentle.

**Hills are often a source of frustration to drivers when the roads are snow covered. Good tires are a must, though much can be gained with driving techniques.** As you approach a hill pull the gear shift lever into 2nd range. Accelerate a little as you do so. You don't want the car to shift half way up the hill or you will lose it. Now accelerate a little more, just enough to feel the tires begin to spin. This may cause you to skid a little so be alert with the steering wheel. Now very gently ease up on the accelerator, just to the point that the tires cease to spin. Hold it steady there and continue. If you again feel the tires begin to spin, ease off the accelerator ever so gently. If you quickly let up you will lose it. The trick here is to apply just enough gas to keep the tires right on the verge of spinning, but not spinning. Your pace may slow as you go up the hill but, it you get to the top when other drivers don't, who cares?

If you need to start from a dead stop on a hill accelerate very gently and try to keep the tires from spinning. This will usually get you going but there are always those times when it won't. Sometimes when the snow is right fresh, you can get the tires spinning and burn down to traction, but if the snow is packed forget it.

Beware of black ice. Freeway overpasses are often covered with ice even when the rest of the road is bare and dry. The reason is that the cold air gets under the bridge and keeps the road surface frozen, whereas the rest of the road gets some heat from the earth so it will melt and dry. An overpass that is also on a curve should be approached very carefully. This is one of those situations that can put you into a four wheel skid. Areas that are shaded all day are also often covered with black ice. Then there are those times that the whole road may be covered with black ice. This may be after a rain when the temperature suddenly drops or sometimes the rain freezes as it hits the road. Be alert. Be careful. Slow down.

Leave early. Allow yourself more time to get to your destination so that you won't feel rushed. Watch the weather forecast so that you can get up earlier if snow is expected next morning. By leaving early you may also avoid some traffic.

With the car in good shape and with good driving techniques, it is most always possible to get to your destination. It is the other drivers that so often cause us trouble. Be alert. Allow more space between the next driver than you normally do on dry roads.

After a snow, find a deserted parking lot or empty road and practice putting the vehicle out of control. This is a good way to get the feel of the car on slick roads and you can practice steering out of a skid, stopping, accelerating, etc. At 20 MPH hit the brakes hard and see what happens. In this way you can experience all these things without taking your life in your hands, and learn the techniques that will help you get safely to your destination.

Be prepared. Be alert. Be safe and don't forget to wave "Hello" to your neighbors as you drive by, you never know when it will be you who needs help or a favor. ;-)

\*\*\*\*This information sheet was put together by J.T. Winborn, certified EMT, Mountaineer, multiple Off-road/ On-road driving course graduate, and U.S. Special Forces Soldier - October, 2010