

# Winter Driving Obstacle Course

We put together a handy obstacle course with the basic tenets of winter driving, which a shocking number of Bendites could learn from

By Jack Harvel

When I moved to a mountain town, I thought you folks would know how to drive during the winter. Boy, was I wrong. As a simple Midwesterner, I was used to the occasional snowstorm and how to drive on it — and so were other drivers who, from my limited anecdotal experience, fared better than the snow-hardened Central Oregonian. It's so bad I almost have come to believe in the mythically monstrous Californian transplant. So, I decided to imagine a winter driving course on the basics on winter driving I've learned through years of common sense and a conversation with Nancy Haase, program manager for the High Desert Drivers Education Program. If you make it to the end, you get a prize!

START



## Keep Your Distance

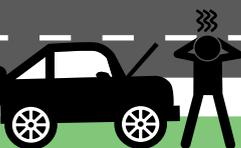
People believe in their heart that if they keep within a couple feet of the driver in front of them, they will somehow get to their destination faster. It's a stupid belief, but probably driven by our lizard brain's knowledge that you're just a bit closer to where you're going if you're closer to the car in front of you. With clear roads this can be a nuisance, but with slippery winter conditions there's a good chance a quick stop will end in a fender bender.

"I tell my students to imagine there's another car behind the car you're stopping behind and stop at that point and then you can ease in, but have more following distance between you and the car in front of you at all times," Haase said. "We ask our students to always have four seconds of following distance unless they're at highway speeds, and then have six seconds."

## Your Four-Wheel Drive Isn't as Good as You Think

Your Subaru, 4Runners and lifted trucks slide around on ice just like any other car. Take stock of the cars you see stalled on the side of the road during the next snowstorm; you might be surprised by how many supposedly high-performing snow cars get stuck. A four-wheel drive can be essential in some circumstances, but it doesn't mean you don't have to adjust your driving.

"They might be able to go faster, but they can't stop faster," Haase said. "When you're faster, and when you hit that black ice or the icy spots, your car is going to be out of control and it's going to be out of control at a faster speed."



## Sliding

If you drive on ice you're going to slide eventually. A knee-jerk reaction to sliding on ice may be to hit the brakes, but that could actually result in less control. If you're at highway speeds, and are keeping your distance from other cars, let the car slow down on its own to regain control.

"A stopped tire has no traction. It's just going to put you more into that skid if you hit the brake," Haase said. "Let your car slow down on its own and then start to slowly accelerate towards your target."



## Treading the Needle

Four-wheel drive won't slow you down, but your tires could be the difference between a clean stop and long slide. A good pair of winter tires, studded tires or chains is going to give you more mobility than your standard all-season tires — which are really only designed for light snow.



## Know What You're Driving On

Fresh snow, solid ice, slush and black ice all provide different challenges for driving. You'll have more traction in snow but it'll be easier to get stuck. Solid ice makes it harder to get moving and needs longer to stop. Black ice and slush can be deceptive and lull you into a false sense of comfort. It's best to test what you're driving on early in a car trip to inform how you drive.

"I give myself a little acceleration and a slow speed to see if I am going to slide and then I test the brakes," Haase said. "Chunky ice is really, really hard because it throws your car around. Slush is also very dangerous, and it will just throw you all over the road. Black ice, of course, is deadly."



## Congratulations! You Made It

Congratulations! You've passed the winter driving obstacle course and now have about the same knowledge expected of anyone who possesses a drivers license. Your prize for completing this course is the continued functionality of the front end of your car — the back end will depend on if the person behind you also passed the course.



FINISH

