

Getting Unstuck From A Snowdrift

Use finesse rather than power when extricating your vehicle from snow and ice this winter.

Hard acceleration usually won't help. In fact, it's likely to worsen the situation by causing the tires to spin, and digging the car deeper into the snow. The AAA recommends the following tips:

Clear away as much snow as possible from around the tires and under the vehicle.

To improve traction, scatter sand, cat litter or some other abrasive material around the front wheels for front-wheel-drive cars, and around the rear wheels for rear-wheel-drive cars. Special traction mats are also available for this purpose. Floor mats also can be used.

Place the car in low gear (automatic transmissions) or second gear (manual transmissions) and apply gentle pressure to the accelerator. Ease off if the tires begin to spin.

If still unable to move, try slowly rocking the car. Ease forward with the car in low gear (automatic transmissions) or second gear (manual transmissions).

When the car will no longer go forward, release the accelerator to allow the car to roll back. When the vehicle stops its backward motion, apply minimum pressure on the accelerator again. Repeat these actions in rapid succession.

If the vehicle remains stuck, do not continue rocking for prolonged periods.

Serious damage to automatic transmissions may occur.

If others are available to help, have them push to assist the car's rocking motion. People pushing the vehicle should not stand directly behind the wheels because of potential risk from flying gravel, sand and ice. Also, they should be aware of their own physical limitations. Footing can be hazardous and overexertion can be especially dangerous in cold weather.

If you are unable to free your vehicle, carefully assess weather conditions before abandoning your vehicle. In extreme cold or in heavy snow, stay with your car until you can be rescued.

If you stay in your car, tie a bright cloth to your antenna to alert rescuers.

If running the engine for warmth, make sure snow does not block the exhaust pipe, which would cause dangerous fumes to backup inside the car.

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