



## Are You Ready For Old Mr. Freeze To Come Knocking On Your Car Door?



Old Man Winter hates your car. He's out to freeze its battery solid. He's going to try to steal its traction with ice and snow. He'll dim its lights, streak its windshield and lure it toward a snow-filled ditch whenever possible. So be prepared. It's time to winterize. If cold and snow come with your climate, investing a little time and money now could pay big dividends when the first blast of winter arrives.

Checking just five key items on your car, truck or sport-utility vehicle will help make it a more reliable and safer travel partner from now until the aroma of spring flowers fills the air.

### Check Your Car's Battery

There's no more depressing sound on a frigid morning than the "click, click, click" of a starter that's not getting enough juice to turn over your car's engine. As the temperature drops, a battery naturally loses power, which means that if your vehicle battery is marginal now, it might be dead when the thermometer dips close to zero. Ask your Fast Track technician to give the battery a load test, this simulates cranking the starter for 15 seconds and removes amps from the battery. If the battery drops below 9.5 volts it should be replaced, because under extreme conditions it may not be able to start the car.



### Change Your Tires

Tire performance is critical when traction is at a premium. For optimal winter grip, consider replacing all-season tires with a set of winter-rated tires. Identified by a mountain-peak-and-snowflake symbol on the sidewall, they have a tread pattern and compound designed to excel on ice and snow and to stay elastic in extremely cold temperatures. In severe cold the tread compound of all-season tires becomes hard and offers reduced traction — even on dry pavement.

"In areas with significant snowfall, all-season tires may give you adequate mobility, but they will not let you drive with confidence. While there are many variables to consider, in general, a winter tire will offer 30 percent more traction than an all-season tire, which enhances stopping, starting and handling dramatically.



## Replace Your Wipers

If you live in a cold northern climate, you might consider converting to winter wiper blades, which have a wiping-edge compound that stays flexible in the cold and a rubber boot that covers the steel frame so that accumulating snow and ice do not keep it from flexing and conforming to curved shape of the windshield. However, on some vehicles winter blades may occasionally lift away from the windshield at speed and in some wind conditions. But they never freeze up. This is an easy winter upgrade you can install yourself without tools. Always carry a jug of washer fluid in the car to top off an empty reservoir.



## Aim Your Headlights

Headlight performance is more critical in the winter simply because we spend more time driving in the dark. Start by aligning, or "aiming," your headlights per the owner's manual. Many vehicles now have small bubble-levels on top of the light housing (you have to open the hood to see them) that act as guides. By adjusting a knob or screw, you can center the bubble to aim the headlight up and down. Aiming the lights won't help much if the plastic lens over the lamp is yellowed or hazy. I've seen cars and trucks on the road with headlamp covers so bad they look frosted, a situation that dramatically



reduces the light output. It's mostly exposure to ultraviolet light that causes the polycarbonate covers to grow cloudy with age. For less than \$30 you can fix this yourself with a product such as the Meguiar Headlight Restoration Kit or the 3M Headlight Lens Restoration System, which come with a special plastic-polishing compound and a buffing pad you fit into an electric drill. Finally, keep your headlights clean. Use the windshield-washing tool at the gas station to wipe away dried salt residue, which can also diminish headlight performance.

## Go Fog-Free

Fogged-up interior glass can be a winter-driving headache in cold, damp climates, and a safety issue if it impedes the driver's view. To fight fogging, start by cleaning the inside of the windshield and windows with a quality glass cleaner and a terrycloth towel. Interior glass is often coated with a thin, oily film of gunk that "gasses off" of the plastic dash in hot weather. This film attracts moisture to the glass. Residue from cigarette smoke has the same effect. You may have to go over the glass several times to really remove the film.

Running the air conditioner with the defroster will carry moisture out of the cabin and help defog the windows. Keep the ventilation system on the "fresh air" setting so that damp air is exhausted from the car, not just recalculate it in the cabin. Finally, try to brush snow off your clothes and boots before you get into the car — melting snow adds humidity to the air, which fogs the windows.