

23 December 2009

In The Bleak Midwinter

With an estimated 12 million drivers preparing to take to the road this Christmas, the usual advice about avoiding unnecessary journeys is of limited use, said the IAM (Institute of Advanced Motorists). Instead, drivers should allow extra time for their journey – and avoid being over-cautious, which can sometimes create additional problems on the road.

“Too many drivers lack the skills and experience to tackle snow and icy conditions, and it shows,” said IAM Chief Examiner Peter Rodger.

“Our message to drivers is to assess the type of road you’re driving on. Going too fast is dangerous, but so too is going too slowly. In snow, you should drive slowly enough so you can stop, but also fast enough to give you the all-important momentum to deal with hills so you can avoid sliding back and getting stuck,” he said.

Local authorities may have failed to grit some rural and minor roads, but gridlock in snow over the recent days is likely to get worse as more drivers take to the road.

“Give yourself plenty of time. And prepare your car. Listen to travel and weather bulletins and plan your route using the main roads as much as possible.”

Mr Rodger said that common faults included cars travelling far too close to the vehicle in front, not allowing nearly enough room to stop, and overcautious driving, with drivers causing queues in their wake, particularly approaching slopes and hills.

For those drivers who have no option but to take to the road in the run up to Christmas, the IAM has repeated its advice for motorists:

Is your journey really necessary? If it is, plan it and give yourself plenty of time. Tell someone your intended route and how long you think it's going to take. Listen to the radio for details about road and weather conditions, and heed police warnings.

Clean the windscreen and windows using a demisting preparation. Check that screen washers are not blocked and that the screen washer bottle is topped up and has a winter additive to stop it freezing. Check that the windscreen wipers are in good condition and work effectively.

Ensure that all lights, brake lights, indicators are working properly and the lenses are clean, and free of snow and ice.

Ensure that tyres are in good condition and are properly inflated.

Keep your speed down and increase the safety gap between you and the vehicle in front – because your stopping distances increase dramatically and can take up to ten times longer to stop when the road is wet or icy.

There is lots of ice, so avoid skids by braking, steering, acceleration, decelerating and gear changing very gently. If a skid occurs, no matter how strong the temptation, do not brake. Instead, lose speed by gently easing the pressure on the accelerator pedal and, if appropriate, de-clutch.



News Release (Continued)

“Technology such as ESC (electronic stability control) or traction control can help but the driver must use road sense and keep the vehicle moving at the right speed for the circumstance,” said Mr Rodger.

ENDS

Media contacts:

IAM Press Office – 020 8996 9777

press.office@iam.org.uk

ISDN broadcast lines available

iam.org.uk

ENDS ALL

1. The IAM (Institute of Advanced Motorists) directly influences the driving and riding of more than 100,000 full members in the UK and Ireland. Established in 1956, the IAM is today best known for the advanced driving test and the advanced driving course, which is available to car, motorcycle and commercial licence holders. The IAM has grown to become the UK's largest independent road safety charity, dedicated to raising driving standards, engaging with the road-using public and influencing road safety policy. The commercial division of the IAM operates through occupational driver training companies IAM Fleet UK and Drive & Survive.

2. A 2006 report by Brunel University, following an 18 month study, concluded that “advanced driver training produces safer drivers and lower accident involvement”, with measurable improvements in knowledge, skills and attitude.

3. In January 2007, the IAM Motoring Trust was established as the Policy and Research Division to undertake research, promote practical policies, act as an advocate for safer roads, safer drivers and safer vehicles and encourage responsible motoring through education and training.

