



# Safety Talk

## Skidding

It's an unfortunate fact of our driving lives that hardly any drivers ever get a chance to practice skid control and recovery. Many drivers, especially the pros, have read about what to do in skids, spins and slides. But reading advice and then following it instinctively are two different things. The instructions for skid recovery call for an unnatural reaction by the driver. So too many of us - when we go into an actual skid - usually let reflexes take over and make the wrong moves.

We usually associate loss of control through skids with icy roads. But that's only one of many ways that the friction between your tires and road can be reduced. A road, right after the start of a rain, will get very slick due to the mixture of water with the oily road film that's on the surface of the pavement.

During a heavy rain, water on the pavement can lead to a phenomenon known as hydroplaning. The front wheels of the vehicle actually can rise off the road surface and ride on a wedge of water. There's a complete loss of steering control, and the only solution is to reduce speed. This doesn't mean slamming on the brakes in panic. It means that you gradually reduce pressure on the accelerator and bring the speed down.



Skids, spins and slides can also happen on dry surfaces when the vehicle is going fast enough and the driver tries to change direction too quickly. As a matter of fact, most of the time when a car goes into a skid or slide, it's because the vehicle is going around a corner or changing its forward direction.

Here are the basic rules for keeping control:

1. Learn to recognize the sort of situations that cause skidding. Wet roads, icy roads, oil slicks, sand or gravel on the road, bald tires, high speed -- all can set you up for a skid.
2. Ease off on the accelerator and avoid heavy braking. A hard, solid application of the brake usually only makes the skid worse.
3. "Stab" or pump-braking is the correct way. Here, there is a momentary application and release of the brakes. You don't want to lock up the wheels, but just bring them to the point where they're still turning. Once you go into lock-up, you've lost steering control.
4. Turn your front wheels in the same direction the rear wheels are sliding. The second you feel the skid coming under control, turn the front wheels back into the opposite direction and then into a straight line.

Probably one of the most important pieces of advice that can be given is to try to find an opportunity to practice going into skids, spins, and slides at low speeds on a wide open area such as a vacant, icy, wide-open parking lot.

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