

FREE WINTER CHECK

A GUIDE TO WINTER MAINTENANCE



the fuelcard people

TOP 5 WINTER CAR ISSUES

Winter sees a massive increase in car problems ranging from common nuisances to top causes of breakdowns.

That's why we've put together a list of our top five winter car issues – how many of these have you encountered?

1. Frozen windscreen washers

Not a massive issue but a common inconvenience for motorists in winter is the freezing of windscreen washers.

Cause: the cause is simple – a combination of not using a strong enough screenwash solution and lower temperatures.

Problems: drivers often only realise how useful windscreen washers are when they need to use them and they fail! A possible worse issue that could arise is continuing to run the washer pump when it's frozen which can lead to a burnt-out motor or blown fuse.

Solution: use a proper screenwash solution all year round and remember to use a stronger or undiluted mix during the colder winter months which will ensure the screenwash won't freeze.



2. Frozen door locks and seals

This could leave you unable to unlock or open your car doors.

Cause: leaving fallen snow on car for a long period without clearing it which causes the soft snow to freeze solid.

Problems: forcing frozen locks could cause serious, expensive-to-fix damage, and forcing frozen-shut doors to open could damage the seals leading to future water ingress.

Solution: clear fallen snow daily whilst it is still soft and loose, and a squirt of a water-dispersant like spray grease could prevent the locks from freezing. Use a de-icer around the door edges to release if they feel harder to open than usual.



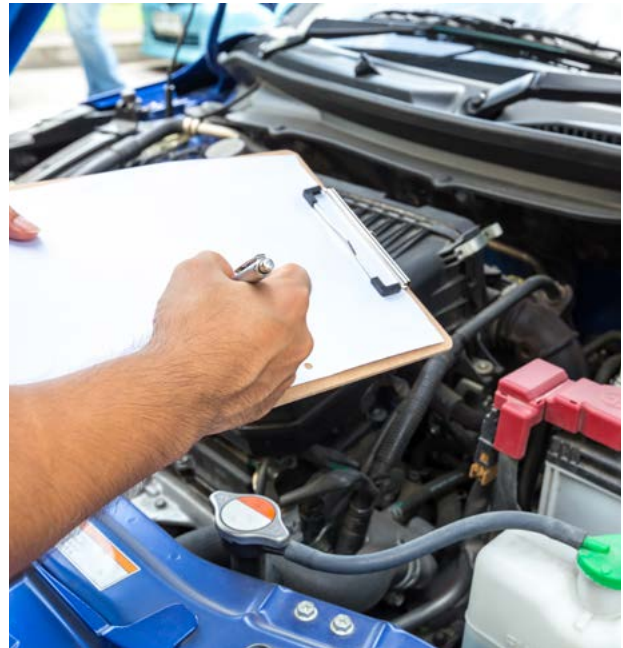
3. Battery problems

Old batteries often fail during winter when the colder temperatures are harder on them and motorists use more electric functions such as lights, heaters and fans.

Cause: colder temperatures make old batteries work harder: ability to output power drops, recharging capacity drops and load increases.

Problems: if your battery can't output enough power you may be left unable to start your car on a cold morning.

Solution: if your battery is more than five years old – get it replaced. If your car's been sat still for long periods or been doing lots of short journeys, it may need a good charge. If your car is struggling to start in the morning, turn off all the electrical add-ons like heated seats, fans and stereo before trying to start to give the battery a better chance.



4. Icy skids or spins

Roads get icy and slippery during winter and if your tyres aren't in good condition and aren't inflated properly you could risk a scary skid or spin.

Cause: it doesn't need snowfall to cause icy roads. Lower temperatures can lead to standing water, rainfall or condensation freezing on roads. Tyres don't grip properly when bald, cracked or under/over inflated.

Problems: lack of grip could mean your wheels lose grip leading to a skid or spin, or worse you could be unable to stop suddenly when needed leading to an accident.

Solution: check your tyre tread – a minimum of 1.6mm is needed. If you have less than 3mm left, consider getting them changed now as performance will already be much less than when new. Also, check your pressures are set to your manufacturer recommendation.



5. Poor running engines

If you haven't had your car serviced regularly, your spark plugs could be worn out or your HT leads could have deteriorated.

Cause: spark plugs are vital in making your engine run smoothly and when worn or damaged could lead to rough idling or misfiring. HT leads are also a vital part of the ignition system but often overlooked.

Problems: if either of these are failing it could make it difficult to start your car or lead to a rough-idling engine.

Solution: take your car in for a full service and a qualified mechanic can check the condition of your HT leads and spark plugs – if they need replacing it's a quick job and shouldn't cost too much. If they are in OK condition, fresh oil, new filters and a tune-up can make all the difference to a poor running engine anyway.

10 POINT WINTER CHECK

There are some simple checks you should carry out before winter sets in to make sure your car is ready. Some of them are simple and you can do at home, some you must take to a mechanic to perform.

Check with your local garage as some of them may be able to give your car a winter check over for a small cost or even for free!

1. Battery

- Voltage output (13.7V to 14.7V with engine running)
- Charging capacity (12.6V or above with engine off)



2. Brakes

- Pad/shoe wear (get your garage to check)
- Disc/Drum condition (get your garage to check)

3. Coolant/Antifreeze

- Level (check your owner manual)
- Strength (get your garage to check)
- Engine Oil
- Level (check your owner manual)

4. Engine Oil

- Level (check your owner manual)

5. Exhaust

- Noise (has the noise output changed recently?)
- Excessive smoke (run the engine and check for smoke)



6. Exterior Lights

- Indicators (front/rear/sides)
- Headlights (dipped/full beam)
- Sidelights (front/rear)
- Reversing
- Number plate lights
- Brake lights
- Fog lights (more common in winter months)



7. Heating and Air Conditioning

- Demisting performance (does A/C de-mist windscreen properly?)
- Damp/odour (run on hot and cold)
- Heat output (is the temperature control working?)

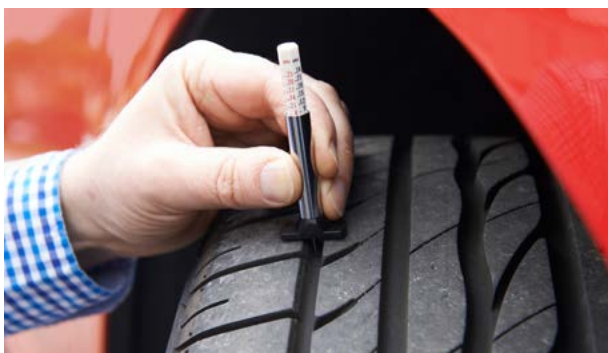
8. Windscreen

- Chips, cracks (colder weather can cause small chips to turn into large cracks)
- Dirt/smears (clean glass is less likely to fog up)



9. Tyres

- Tread depth (1.6mm legal minimum)
- Cracks/splits/wear (consider replacing)
- Pressures (check your owner manual)
- Spare tyre/repair kit (check it's in the car and usable)



10. Wiper Blades/Screen Wash

- Smears on windscreen? (if so try cleaning)
- Clean? (if visibly oily clean with vinegar)
- Cracks/splits? (if so replace)
- Smooth movement (check hinges)
- Screenwash level (check your owner manual)
- Screenwash strength (top up with undiluted solution if need be)



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WINTER SURVIVAL KIT

Motorists are more likely to break down in winter than any other time of year. There's also a greater probability of delays on the roads.

No matter what vehicle you are in or how good a driver you are, if there is a big accident on the roads you could face several hours sitting still whilst the road is cleared. And winter is a time when you don't want to be sat still in a car without being prepared for the cold.

We've given you the tips to reduce the risk of a breakdown, but in case you do get stuck, here's our checklist of things to keep in your car and things to do to be prepared for the cold weather

Things to keep in the car

- Sat-nav or map book
- A snow shovel
- Windshield scraper and small brush/broom
- Torch (and extra batteries)
- Water
- Snacks/food
- Extra hats, socks and gloves
- Good sturdy footwear
- First aid kit
- Necessary medications
- Blankets or sleeping bag
- Small bag of road salt
- Mobile phone in-car charger to plug into lighter

How to prepare for the worst

- Check your car before travelling
- Make sure you have breakdown cover and know the phone number
- Keep your fuel topped up at least half full
- Check the weather forecast and avoid driving when weather warnings are in place
- If you get stuck, stay in your vehicle and try and phone help
- Be prepared to stay in your vehicle overnight if the need arises



Sources

[Winter Breakdown Causes](#)

[Common Winter Car Problems](#)

[Winter Flat Battery Breakdown](#)

[Tyre Fitting](#)

[Car Battery Voltage Testing](#)

[How To Make A Winter Survival Kit For The Car](#)

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