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As the days start to get shorter, and the temperatures begin to fall, one should turn their attention to preparing their vehicle for the cold winter months ahead. Vehicle safety is important during winter weather conditions, especially if you drive on icy or snowy roads. Here are a few ways to winterize your car for colder days and make the driving easier for you.

**Good Visibility is Vital**

If your wipers are leaving streaks of water on your windshield, or if the wiper-blade rubber shows any signs of cracking or stiffness, replace them with a new set. Make sure your windshield washer reservoir is filled with a washer solution that contains an antifreeze agent. Also, make sure your car’s heater is functioning properly to be able to direct warm air to the windshield when it is in defrost mode. Finally, check that all the vehicle’s lights are working properly and clear of snow and ice so you will have optimum visibility at night and that other motorists will be able to see you.

**Consider a Switch to Winter Tires**

If you drive a lot in slippery in slippery conditions, it’s a good idea to replace your all-season tires with a set of dedicated winter tires, which have tread patterns and rubber compounds specifically designed for optimum traction on slick roads. If you are using winter tires, you might want to consider having them mounted on inexpensive steel wheels. This will make it easier to switch between the two sets of tires and save your expensive alloy wheels from the damage inflicted by harsh winter conditions.

**Keep the Battery in Good Shape**

Cold Temperatures reduce your battery’s cranking power-in fact, at about zero degrees F, your battery only has about half the cranking power it has at 80 degrees. At the same time, the thickened oil in a cold engine makes it harder to turn over. For conventional batteries, remove the plastic caps on top of the

battery and check the fluid level. If the fluid level is low, add distilled water. On maintenance-free batteries, check that the window at the top of the battery indicates a fully charged state. If it’s not, have the battery professionally tested at a service station. If it is defective, its best to replace it before it goes completely dead.

**Make Sure You Use The Right Engine Oil**

Engine oil thickens when cold, making it harder for the engine to turn over. Modern cars use multi-weight oil that is suitable for a wide range of temperatures, but some manufacturers recommend specific grades of oil for specific temperature ranges. If you expect to experience extremely low temperatures, you can have an engine block heater installed in the engine. When plugged into a household electrical outlet, it keeps the engine oil from getting cold and thick.

**Check Your Cooling System**

Extreme cold can cause rubber parts to become brittle and fail. When the engine is cold, check the radiator and heater hoses for cracking, leaking, or contamination from oil or grease. The hoses should be firm, yet pliable when you squeeze them. Replace them if they feel brittle or overly soft.

For most vehicles, the cooling system should be flushed at least every two years. This helps keep corrosion from building up in the system. Do this before cold weather hits. The system should be refilled with a mixture of antifreeze and water, typically at a 50/50 ratio. This will keep your coolant from freezing to well below zero.

**Protection For Inside and Out**

The dirt and salt of winter can attack your car’s paint finish. To help protect it, give the car a fresh coat of wax before the snow flies and wash it regularly during the winter months. Wash the wheel wells and underbody regularly to prevent road salt from building up. Apply wax to alloy wheels to help prevent pitting and corrosion. Use floor mats to protect your car’s carpet from water and mud that tends to get tracked into the vehicle.

**Prevent Freeze-ups**

Water can get into door and trunk locks and then freeze, locking you out of the vehicle. To prevent this, lubricate the locks with a silicone spray or door-lock lubricant. If they are already frozen, use a lock antifreeze product to thaw them.