

# Top **10 Snow Tire** **Take Aways**

## **1. Snow tires or All-Seasons?**

An all-season tire provides a baseline level of performance in all conditions. While its performance in snow and ice has improved over time, the fundamental problems of a rubber compound soft enough to be pliable in the cold and tough enough to have good tread life in the summer heat limit the tire's effectiveness at either extreme.

A snow tire is made from a softer rubber compound with deeper tread and a more aggressive tread design. If you live in the snow belt or in a rural or mountainous area that routinely sees snow and ice conditions, the increase in traction from a snow tire adds a level of safety that cannot be found any other way.

If you are an experienced driver living on the edges of the snow belt and rarely have to drive in unplowed snow or on ice, an all-season radial with plenty of tread depth should be adequate.

## **2. How do I know which snow tire to buy?**

Performance winter/snow tires sacrifice some deep snow and ice traction for better dry and wet road traction, better handling, less noise and higher speed capability.

Studdable winter/snow tires will accommodate metal studs and feature traditional large-lug tread design. They are a low-cost option without studs installed, and can be comparatively noisy with or without studs.

Studless ice and snow tires are a high-tech alternative to studs, and have the best snow and ice traction of all studless tires.

## **3. OK, I want the best traction I can get. How can I tell?**

Winter tires branded with the "snowflake on the mountain" icon on their sidewalls meet the severe snow service standards established by the U.S. Rubber Manufacturers Assn. and Rubber Association of Canada for harsh winter conditions. These tires, along with tire chains, are considered traction devices, allowing them passage in many mountainous regions where other snow tires without chains are turned back.

## **4. Does it cost more to buy snow tires than using all-season tires year round?**

Not really. Winter tires are not likely to be more expensive than regular tires, and because your three-season wheels and tires are avoiding four months of salt and potholes each year, they'll last longer and look better at trade-in time. The real benefit, though, is knowing you haven't compromised safety by using a tire all winter that wasn't designed for the job.

## **5. Two or four snow tires?**

Four tires. Always. With four new tires, the car will handle the same way it does on summer tires, only with much more grip on snow and ice.

## **6. What should I know about studded tires?**

Studded tires are the best for traction on ice; they are also noisy and cause collateral damage ranging from road degradation to air pollution. Use them if you can't get by any other way. If you do use them, rotate them front to back on the same side every season or 4000 miles, or dismount and remount them for use on the other side. Once used, don't mount them in a manner that reverses their initial rolling direction.

## **7. What size for snow tires?**

Your snow tires should be the same size as your original tires or smaller with a higher profile than your summer tires, so that the diameter of the wheel/tire remains the same as your summer tires.

## **8. What tire pressure for snow tires?**

Many manufacturers recommend operating winter tires 3-5 psi higher than recommended summer and all-season tire pressures. We agree, and go into more detail on this during our classes.

## **9. Same wheels or different wheels?**

Mounting your snow tires on the wheels you have means that you don't need to buy more wheels. It also means you will be paying mount and balance costs twice a year, and those pretty alloy wheels will be in the salt all winter. If you choose to mount snow tires on a separate set of wheels, use wheels that were designed for the year, make and model of your car. That way, you can be sure you haven't changed any dimensions that are important to safe handling and steering.

## **10. What's a safe limit for tread wear on snow tires?**

A snow tire needs four features for good performance: an effective tread design, pliable tread compound, sufficient tread depth and the right tire pressure. The last two are controlled by the driver.

The legal minimum for tread depth in most places is 2/32". It may be legal, but it's not safe. A snow tire with only 2/32" tread is a hydroplane hazard at shockingly low speeds. Tire Rack recommends replacing snow tires expected to encounter wet weather at 4/32", and those expected to encounter snow at 6/32"

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