

Headed north?

A day or two of advanced winter training will improve your skills year-round.

by Mark Cox

Maybe you're headed to Flagstaff for a few days, or to a ski weekend in the White Mountains, or driving home for the holidays. If it's been awhile since you've tackled the white stuff, you might find your confidence is down. You've long since dispatched your last set of snow tires, and you've seldom actually used your four wheel drive.

Plan your trip to include a couple of days at the Bridgestone Winter Driving School in Colorado, and you'll learn that driving on ice and snow can be safe, reliable and even a lot of fun.

The challenge

True driving enthusiasts drive for the love of driving and the freedom of new experiences; they are always looking for an opportunity to enjoy driving in as many ways as possible.

One of the most enjoyable ways to learn more about the relationship between you and your car, and to learn more about yourself, is to intentionally use the car in different environments and explore the sensations and possibilities that go along with every combination of terrain and climate. Expand your horizon. Branch out and experience everything the world has to offer from the driver's seat.

Arizona is the perfect location for the driving enthusiast, with the mountains and almost every combination of spring, fall, summer and winter just a short drive away. For true explorers, the winter capital of the US is only a day's drive north, in Steamboat Springs, Colorado.

The sport of driving

Give some thought to the sport of driving. It is a sport, not just a way to get from point A to point B, but a sport that can be mastered at a variety of different skill levels. Upper level participants have learned a very important lesson, whether you are driving down the road minding your own business or charging around a race track surrounded by other competitors: traction is very big part of your driving life.

Most drivers don't give a second thought to loss of traction until they are either involved in an emergency situation or have driven far enough north to experience nature's version of loss of traction: snow and ice. For some it's an annoyance, for others a challenge, and for some just plain frightening. For the enlightened driving enthusiast this becomes an opportunity to see just how refined their car control skills are.

The challenge of driving on ice and perfecting the skills required with minimal traction translate directly to driving on gravel, in mud, on a wet highway and even on pavement at higher speeds. Come discover a facility that provides an opportunity to make these difficult driving situations a thing of the past. Yes, history. Driving on the most slippery surfaces available is actually entertainment for drivers who have experienced the Bridgestone Winter Driving School.



Photo by Kyle W. Cox

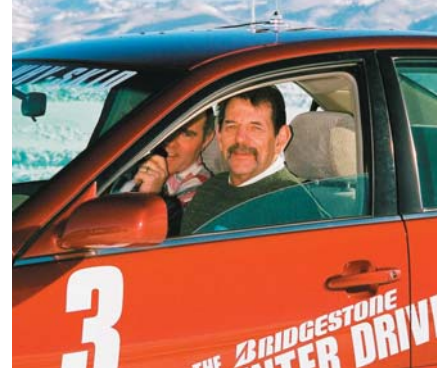
■ The School's vehicle fleet features Toyota front-, rear- and four-wheel drive vehicles—including compacts, sedans, trucks and SUVs.

The School

This winter driving school is the only one of its kind in the United States and is patterned after the great ice driving schools of Europe, where driving on changing surfaces is not only a way of life but a sport actively practiced by a majority of drivers. Coaching is available in a variety of disciplines, from safe driving programs for the new driver to

race training for the professional racer and every skill level in between. The program is operated on a 120-acre purpose-built facility in Steamboat Springs, offering two distinct one-mile-long, ten-turn road courses, covered with several

hundred thousand gallons of water under freezing conditions, to create the most challenging driving situations available. Snow bank guardrails delineate the track and provide good visibility even in winter's worst conditions; however,



Photos by Kyle W. Cox

Steamboat Springs boasts over 300 sunny days a year, while accumulating record levels of snowfall.

This facility doesn't just cater to the northern climes: during the winter of 2001/02, participants came from all 50 states and 11 foreign countries for this exclusive training. Ages range from 15 to 82, and men and women attend in almost equal numbers, proving that the modern driving enthusiast isn't necessarily male.

A fleet of new Toyota vehicles are provided and represent all types of drive and body configurations, including front-, rear- and four-wheel drive in the form of sport compacts, sedans, SUVs and trucks.

Every program starts with participants experiencing the course from the seat of a fully winter-prepared, two-way radio-equipped school vehicle. After successful completion of the basics, the full track is made available to participants for practice, in their own personal vehicles if desired.

Hands-on training is the order of the day, regardless of the program. As with any sport, watching videos and reading books can only go so far in teaching the necessary skills; it's the seat of the pants feel, muscle memory and proper control inputs that make the difference when it counts.

Classroom time is brief and typically limited to the initial briefing and video tape analysis of driver-on-course performance. Beyond that it's on-course driving.

The Bridgestone Winter Driving Coaching Staff are professional drivers with experience in most every form of professional motorsports. They have each spent hundreds of hours at the edge of

DRIVING TIPS & TRICKS

Tips for safe driving in winter conditions:

- Scrape all snow and ice off of your vehicle—including the roof!
- Keep your headlights clear of ice, snow, and mud
- Do not wear restrictive clothing, such as bulky jackets or mittens
- Keep a continuous flow of warm air circulating, not hot air—hot air will make you drowsy!
- Adjust the driver's seat for minimum strain
- Anticipate
- Slow down!

Tricks for safe driving in all conditions:

- When driving during daylight hours, wear a good pair of sunglasses to reduce eye strain and fatigue.
- Any time you drive in less than ideal weather, make it a habit to turn "Wipers on, Lights on."
- When driving at night, avoid looking directly at oncoming headlights. Instead, look down and to the right, and follow the edge of the road.

control, perfecting the nuances that keep them on the proper side of that edge.

The coaches clearly enjoy their role in helping participants improve as much as possible in the shortest amount of time feasible, and to do so in a fun, friendly atmosphere. There are no sad faces at this facility; this all about fun while learning new skills for the sport of driving.

Everyday application

The skills learned at the Bridgestone Winter Driving School go far beyond winter driving. The same skills apply in every driving condition, in any type of weather, but by improving their skills at this school, participants have practiced in the most difficult situation possible, so everything else follows easily.

After you've spent a few days in a place that averages 27 feet of snow per winter and can hit 58 below zero, wherever else you're driving probably sounds easier already. But the real key is the knowledge and confidence you've gained at the Bridgestone Winter Driving School. By the time you get back to northern Arizona, you'll not only have eliminated any unease, you will actually welcome the chance to try out your new skills. ■

MARK COX is a professional race, stunt and precision driver who competes and performs on every type of slippery surface imaginable, as well as on pavement. In addition to piloting an FIA International Group N rally car in the SCCA US Pro Rally Series, Mark is the Director of the Bridgestone Winter Driving School in Steamboat Springs, Colorado.



Have fun learning how to safely travel on icy roads at the nation's premier ice-driving facility. Bring the whole family for a one-of-a-kind experience in Steamboat Springs!
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