



# SLIDE RULES

## Information Fact Sheet

Australia has close to 800,000km of roads, less than half of which are bitumen or concrete. The rest are gravel/dirt and often of dodgy quality. So chances are you'll occasionally drive on a loose surface.

Bad weather is also unavoidable. Dirt surfaces and wet, snowy and icy roads provide limited grip and require a gentler, more conservative approach behind the wheel.

**On dry bitumen, you should maintain a two-three second gap between you and the car in front.**

### SOME THINGS TO BE AWARE OF

- First rule: slow down! On slippery surfaces the four small patches of rubber on your tyres will have greatly reduced grip. Cornering speeds have to be reduced as you need more room in which to stop.
- On dry bitumen, you should maintain a two-to-three second gap between you and the car in front to give you time to respond to an emergency. On other surfaces or when it's raining, you should double this gap.
- A good driver is a smooth driver. On roads with low grip, keep a delicate touch on the steering wheel, accelerator pedal and brake while resisting sudden or sharp moves. In these conditions, high-quality tyres, good suspension and all-wheel drive are helpful - but not infallible.
- The objective when driving on any surface with minimal grip is to use the accelerator carefully so the wheels of your car are always turning at the same rate as the road running beneath them.
- Things can happen quickly. Use too much accelerator in a front-wheel drive car and the front tyres are inclined to break loose and slide. Ease off the accelerator to allow the front (steering) wheels to regain grip and keep the front wheels pointed where you want to go.
- In a rear-drive car, if the rear wheels lose traction due to excessive power, lift off the accelerator pedal as smoothly as possible, steer where you want to go, then gently re-apply the accelerator when the car has straightened out. Don't try to power out of the slide.
- One advantage of all-wheel drive is that it delivers power and torque to both ends of the car, rather than one. It offers greater tractions in less ideal conditions.

## TYRE MYTHS

Your tyres need to be in peak condition with at least three to four millimetres of tread to work properly in the rain. It's a fallacy that in heavy rain or when driving on dirt roads that your tyre pressures should be lowered. In fact, it's safer to raise them 10 per cent or so. Tyres with higher pressure will keep those grooves on the tread deeper and wider, helping to channel away water. Higher pressures also reduce the chances of sidewall damage by ruts and potholes.

The only time you should consider lowering tyre pressures is when encountering a stretch of deep sand. Here, under-inflated tyres tend to spread across the top of the sand which aid grip.

## ABS BRAKES

**Many cars are fitted with anti-lock braking systems (ABS) which allow hard braking without the risk of wheel lock.**

- ABS is a great safety feature but it is not a cure-all for poor driving. On a dry, sealed road ABS will not stop a moving car a great deal faster than a non-ABS-equipped vehicle when under the control of a skilled driver, but it does make it possible to maintain steering control.
- In rain and snow, ABS is reassuring as it will not allow the driver to get into a brake-induced skid. But if the driver is travelling too fast into a corner on a slippery road or travelling too close to a car in front which brakes suddenly then ABS will not be much use.
- ABS is less effective on dirt or gravel. In fact, an ABS-equipped car can take longer than a non-ABS-equipped car to come to a halt in a panic straight-line stop. A non-ABS-equipped car can build up a loose gravel mound in front of its locked wheels, slowing it down faster.
- Find out if your vehicle is fitted with ABS. If it is, learn when not to rely on it. Treat ABS as an emergency tool - in everyday driving you should rarely, if ever, need it.

## HILLS AND ICE

Heading down a steep, icy hill is tricky because weight and momentum on a slippery surface can be a risky mix. Select a lower gear to provide some useful engine braking and use just enough brake pedal pressure to keep everything under control without locking any of the wheels.

If the wheels do lock, resist the urge to brake harder. Lift your foot off the brake, get the wheels rolling again and the car pointed straight ahead, then gently re-apply the brakes - a little softer this time.

In some parts of NSW - the Snowy Mountains and Blue Mountains, in particular - icy roads are common in winter. Anticipate ice if the forecast is for temperatures near freezing. If plummeting temperatures follow rain or dew, chances are the road surface will be frozen. Ice is common on bridges, where cold air gets to work on the road surface from below. Prevention - fitting chains - is always better than cure. Unfortunately, cars sliding on ice usually don't stop - until they hit something solid.

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