

Caring for cars in winter

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TÜV SÜD: five tips on how to protect your car from road salt

Munich. The storage silos for road salt are filled to the brim and so far this winter snow ploughs and gritters have largely been idle. This is good for the technical systems in our cars, for which corrosive road salt is particularly harmful. Motorists who have not yet prepared their cars for winter conditions should do so now as a matter of urgency. Points to be checked include the paintwork and underbody as well as ensuring sufficient antifreeze in fluids. TÜV SÜD's car experts give five tips.

"Looming Road Salt Shortage" was a common headline in the 2010/2011 winter. By January 2012, in contrast, this de-icer has hardly been used on our roads this winter. This is good for our cars as road salt is corrosive, attacking paintwork, seals, rims and above all the underbodies of cars. Given this, extensive preparation and special care are indispensable to ensure proper car maintenance and functioning. "Motorists that thoroughly prepare their vehicles for winter before the cold and wet weather sets in will stay mobile when temperatures fall below zero and maintain the value of their cars", says Norbert Ollek from the TÜV SÜD subsidiary Auto-Pflege-Zentrum (APZ). However, winter is not only a problem for the technical vehicle systems. Moisture and road salt are also bad for car paintwork and underbodies, explains Ollek. To maintain the long-term value of their cars, motorists should therefore give special attention to paintwork and protective layers.

Underbody check: Floor pans suffer most from road salt and moisture during winter. In addition, stone chips or bottoming out may harm the protective layer, leaving the underbody vulnerable to attacks by road salt and moisture. Because of this, car owners should have the underbody of their cars cleaned and checked by a professional who will detect and repair any weaknesses. "Checking the condition of underbody protection makes good sense even for new vehicles", says Ollek.

Washing: A thorough wash followed by the application of polish and wax is a must before winter, providing optimum paintwork protection against moisture and road salt. When cleaning their cars,

motorists should not forget to apply grease to the door seals. Special rubber protection products are available in specialist shops. The door locks should also be prepared for winter: a graphite-based lock lubricant keeps water away and ensures the locks will continue to operate smoothly. Drivers should also always carry a de-icer spray – which should be kept in the driver's coat or bag, not the glove compartment.

Re-applying protective layers: A layer of wax offers maximum protection against scratches and swirls. Wax should be applied by hand once or twice per year. The wax programme in the car wash will be sufficient for the intervening periods, explains the APZ car care expert. However, before winter sets in it is always worthwhile to give the car a thorough wash and polish before applying a new protective layer of wax by hand. While motorists can do this themselves, the best results are achieved when cleaning and paintwork protection is left to the professionals. Rule of thumb: when water no longer runs off, it's time to apply a new layer of wax!


Frequenting the car wash: Is the car used frequently and often parked on the road? If so, car owners should frequently put their cars through an automatic car wash in winter, choosing a setting with a thorough pre-wash as the paintwork is especially full of dirt and salt in winter. "Motorists that consider the pre-wash of their local car wash insufficient should not be afraid to say so", notes Ollek. If the car is not entirely freed of dirt and debris, stray particles may inflict swirls or scratches on the paint system when the textile brushes of the car wash move along the car. Incidentally, unlike the bristle brushes used in automatic car washes of the past, most car washes today use textile cloths. These are better for the paint system – particularly during winter. Given this and provided a thorough pre-wash is administered, there is no reason not to use an automatic car wash in winter. An important point to note is that drivers should not forget to wipe dry the rubber door seals and re-apply grease after putting their car through the automatic car wash. "Otherwise motorists may become trapped in their cars when the doors freeze in sub-zero temperatures", warns Ollek

Removing scratches: For motorists that travel extensively on motorways and country roads, stone chips are a familiar phenomenon. At high speeds, debris, dirt and road salt are thrown up, fly through the air and impact on the paintwork at full speed. Because of this, exposed areas such as the bonnet, wheel arches or external mirrors are especially prone to paint chips and scratches. Stone chip repairs should always be performed as quickly as possible. Car owners should therefore check the paint system after each wash, and touch up any stone-chip damage. Specialist shops offer mini-repair sets with integrated brushes.

Further information is available at www.tuev-sued.de

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