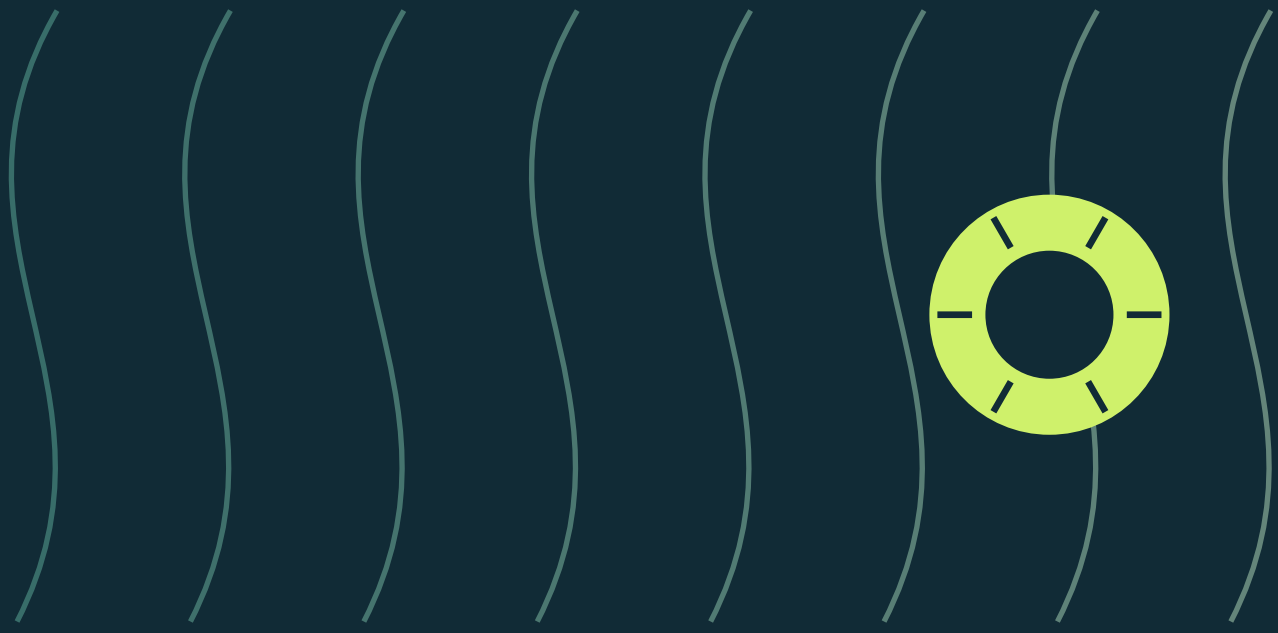
BALKAN FLEET

THE PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR EVERY DRIVER

WINTER DRIVER GUIDE

Before departure. On slippery roads. When plans go wrong.



FREE EDITION FOR FLEETS AND DRIVERS

balkanfleet.com

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Before you go: drive or stop?

If conditions are unsafe, changing the plan is the right decision.

01 / GO

Depart only when safe

The vehicle is roadworthy; winter equipment matches the route; weather, road conditions, stops and alternatives have been checked.

02 / REVIEW

Amber: reduce exposure

Snow or ice on part of the route, strong wind, delays or low visibility require more time, a new route or a discussion with dispatch.

03 / STOP

Do not drive an unsafe vehicle

Unsafe brakes or steering, unsuitable tyres, failed demisting, a critical dashboard warning or an unsafe route: report the issue and resolve it before driving.

04 / OWNERSHIP

Who confirms readiness?

Drivers inspect and report; maintenance determines technical condition; operations confirm routes. Delivery targets never justify operating an unsafe vehicle.

Walk around before driving

A quick check never replaces servicing or a required professional inspection.

VISIBILITY

Clear glass and roof first

Remove snow and ice from windows, mirrors, lamps, cameras and sensors, as well as the roof where snow could fall or endanger others. Check washer fluid, wipers and demisting.

TYRES

Check condition, not just labels

Look for damage, uneven wear, obvious underinflation and worn tread. Measure cold tyre pressures using the vehicle-maker value; legal tread minima vary by country.

WARNINGS

Do not ignore dashboard lights

Check lights, brake lights, indicators and fault messages. If a critical warning appears or braking/steering feels abnormal, arrange an assessment before continuing.

EQUIPMENT

Carry a compact winter kit

Ice scraper, brush, high-visibility vest, warning equipment, phone charger, torch, gloves and warm clothing. For longer trips add water, snacks, blanket and correctly sized chains.

Plan for the delay, too

Good preparation assumes road conditions may change quickly.

FORECAST

Check roads, not only temperature

Use official alerts for snow, wind, closures, restrictions and gritting. Bridges, mountain passes and shaded roads can freeze while other sections remain wet.

MARGIN

Allow time and energy

Build in time for rest, an alternative route and possible queues. Never make up lost time by speeding. Keep an appropriate fuel or battery reserve for delays.

BORDERS

Three checks before crossing

Check tyre markings (M+S/3PMSF), tread depth and chain rules for every country and mountain route. Heavy vehicles, coaches and trailers often have different requirements.

COMMUNICATION

Share your route

On long journeys share your planned route and ETA. In a fleet, use the designated reporting channel; operate a phone only when safely stopped.

Four winter scenarios

Abrupt steering, throttle and braking are the biggest risks on low-grip roads.

BLACK ICE

Hard to spot

Transparent ice is especially hazardous on bridges, shaded bends and elevated roads. Reduce speed early and avoid sudden steering or braking.

SNOW

Fresh or compacted snow

Drive slowly and smoothly. Watch for ruts, drifts and hidden road edges. A cleared lane may not have consistent grip along its length.

SLUSH

Wet snow

Slush can weaken tyre contact. Keep control of the steering wheel, allow a larger gap and avoid deep patches at speed. Sudden movements can cause loss of control.

FOG

Low visibility

Use the correct lights for conditions and local rules. Never rely only on the vehicle ahead as a guide; adapt the following distance to what you can see.

Brake earlier. Steer more gently.

Electronic aids help, but they cannot create grip.

DISTANCE

Leave room for error

Stopping distances can increase substantially on snow and ice. Adjust to visibility, gradient, speed and vehicle mass; no single following gap works in every situation.

BRAKING

If equipped with ABS

In emergency braking with ABS, apply firm, steady pressure and steer towards a safe path. Pedal pulsing is normal; do not pump the brakes.

SKID

If grip is lost

Look where you intend to go, avoid abrupt steering or throttle inputs and ease off gently. Follow vehicle-specific guidance; correct recovery depends on the skid and safety systems.

HILLS

Plan before a steep gradient

Assess the incline before entering. Use smooth propulsion, and reduce speed before descending. Avoid sudden engine braking or strong regenerative deceleration on slippery roads.

Practise chains before the mountain

Both tyre markings and traction devices must suit the specific vehicle and country.

BEFOREHAND

Practise in a safe place

Check chain size, wheel approval, wheel-arch clearance and manufacturer instructions. Practise fitting before the trip, with gloves and a kneeling mat.

WHEN

Do not wait until stuck

Fit chains only at a safe location when necessary or required. Never stop in a live traffic lane for fitting; change your plan if there is no safe place.

HOW

Follow instructions

Driven axle, AWD and some EV models have different restrictions. Follow both vehicle and chain instructions, then recheck tension when advised.

AFTER

Drive slowly and remove safely

Obey chain-maker speed limits and road signs. Remove chains when conditions and local rules permit to avoid damage to tyres and roads.

Anticipate other road users

Winter risk often comes from the behaviour of surrounding traffic.

SNOWPLOUGHS

Give ploughs room

Do not drive close beside a plough or overtake without a clear view and enough room. Winter-service vehicles may slow, turn or discharge snow and grit.

OTHERS

Grip is not the same for everyone

Buses, trucks and loaded vans can behave differently. Stay out of blind spots and avoid braking sharply just ahead of a heavy vehicle.

SHADOW

Wet may still mean frozen

A shaded section or bridge can be much more slippery than the rest of the road. Black ice is often difficult to see. Prepare before the bend, not within it.

FATIGUE

Rest is part of the plan

Demanding winter driving increases fatigue. Take more frequent safe breaks and do not use your phone while driving. Pull over if you feel sleepy.

Breakdown or stranded in snow

Protect people first. The vehicle comes second.

FIRST

Assess your location

If safe, move out of traffic, make yourself visible and call for help. On motorways follow local emergency advice; if the location is dangerous, exit to the safe side and seek protection.

BLIZZARD

Sometimes staying put is safer

In a remote area during a blizzard, sheltering in the vehicle may be safer than walking into the snow. Tell responders your location and monitor passengers.

EXHAUST

Carbon monoxide hazard

For combustion vehicles, keep the exhaust outlet clear of snow. Never run the engine with a blocked exhaust or in an enclosed space. If safe, clear the outlet; use heating intermittently with fresh air entering.

HELP

Give a useful incident report

Share your GPS location, road direction, number of people, injuries, vehicle condition, fuel or battery level and weather. 112 works across the EU; check local emergency numbers elsewhere.

Electric driving in winter

Adapt your energy plan; do not rely on the displayed range alone.

RANGE

Cold changes consumption

Cabin heating, battery temperature, speed, wind and hills affect consumption. Use real usage data and a suitable buffer; do not assume the same winter range loss for every EV.

PRECONDITION

Use shore power when possible

Warm the cabin and battery while plugged in, where supported. A cold battery may accept lower DC charge power; allow extra time.

REGEN

Deceleration may change

Cold weather and high state of charge may reduce regenerative braking. Do not assume the same slowing response every time; be ready to use the service brake.

CHARGING

Inspect the cable and location

Approach icy charger bays carefully. Never use visibly damaged connectors or cables, or attempt high-voltage repairs yourself.

Truck, bus and delivery van

Additional checks, not a substitute for the required daily walkaround.

TRUCK

Air brakes and trailer

Check air build-up and warnings, leaks, trailer coupling, lights, brakes and load restraint. Report frozen or damaged connectors and any other defect.

BUS / COACH

Passengers and doors

Check doors, steps, handholds, heating, demisting, lighting and emergency exits. Icy steps and defective doors must not be left for later.

DEFECTS

Record and report

Note the vehicle ID, date, symptoms and who received the report. Dangerous defects require withdrawal from service until remedied.

CROSS-BORDER

Category and combination matter

For N2/N3 and M2/M3, check axle-specific tyres, tread, chains, trailers and seasons. Never apply passenger-car rules to heavy vehicles by default.

What dispatch and maintenance need

Report what happened, where you are and what help is needed.

01

Where are you?

Location, direction, road number, junction or GPS coordinate. If a road is blocked, give the nearest safe stopping location.

02

What happened?

Describe symptoms, dashboard messages and weather. Add a photograph only if it is safe. Do not guess the technical cause.

03

How serious is it?

Are there injuries or passengers at risk? Is the vehicle obstructing traffic? Do emergency services need to be called?

04

What happens next?

Confirm receipt and who is arranging assistance. Do not continue driving with a critical defect just to meet a deadline.

Winter quick-reference card

Save to your phone or print. This supplements the daily vehicle check.

01

BEFORE DEPARTURE

- Glass, roof, lamps and plates cleared.
- Tyres and warnings checked.
- Heating and demisting work.
- Route, forecast and equipment checked.

02

ON THE ROAD

- Slow down early.
- Increase following distance.
- No abrupt braking or steering.
- Treat bridges and shaded areas as potential ice.

03

IF STRANDED

- Protect people.
- Call for help from a safe place.
- Report exact location and passenger count.
- Keep ICE exhaust outlet clear.

04

STOP / DO NOT DRIVE

- Unsafe brakes, steering, visibility or tyres.
- Critical dashboard warning.
- Closed route or conditions beyond vehicle/driver capability.

Sources and methodology

Click the references to verify. Editorial review: 30 Oct 2026.

NHTSA **NHTSA: winter driving tips**
www.nhtsa.gov

AA **The AA: winter essentials**
www.theaa.com

ICE **The AA: driving on black ice**
www.theaa.com

RSA **Road Safety Authority: severe weather**
www.rsa.ie

DVSA1 **UK DVSA: HGV daily checks**
www.gov.uk

DVSA2 **UK DVSA: bus/coach checks**
www.gov.uk

DVSA3 **UK DVSA: operator safety system**
www.gov.uk

DOE **US DOE: EV cold weather guidance**
afdc.energy.gov

ECC **ECC France, updated 23 Oct 2026**
www.europe-consommateurs.eu

FR **France Service Public, 20 Oct 2026**
www.service-public.gouv.fr

NO1 **Norwegian Roads Administration: heavy t**
www.vegvesen.no

Regulatory information is a planning aid; check current rules for the route and vehicle.