

IF YOUR CAR HYDROPLANES

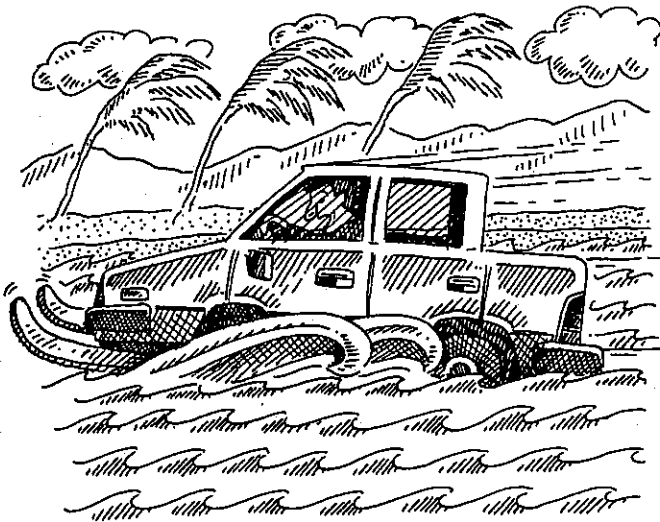
The highway shines from a recent downpour. As you drive through a shallow puddle, your car sends up a fan of spray. You turn your steering wheel to get into a slower lane, but the vehicle doesn't respond. Your car is "hydroplaning." That means it's actually waterskiing on a tiny wave of water that has built up in front of your tires.

Slow Down

Resist the urge to brake or turning suddenly, as you may be tempted to do. The lack of friction between your tires and the road will throw your vehicle into a skid. Ease your foot off the gas until the car slows and you can feel the road again. If you need to brake, do it gently with light pumping actions.

In wet conditions, even vehicles with new tires can hydroplane at speeds of 50 miles per hour. Be careful. You can hydroplane for 20 to 30 feet without knowing it.

Proceed slowly. Unlike a patch of ice, which makes steering suddenly seem light and smooth, the water buildup in front of your wheels can create a false feel of the road. Only in trying to brake or change directions



Hydroplaning is like your car skiing on water with no control.

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will you realize that your tires aren't on the pavement, but are riding on water.

Check Your Tire Tread

Whether your car is as large as a limousine or as small as a sports car, it communicates with the road through four contact patches (or "footprints") where the tires rest on the road. When that contact is broken, your steering and braking capacity are diminished.

Your risk of hydroplaning depends on your tire's tread design and depth as well as your speed. Treads are designed to dry a tire's path. They can do it in two ways: by squeegeeing the water out of the way or by directing it through channels and grooves to the rear and sides of the footprint. This gives the tire a dry spot to grip. But the faster you drive on a wet road, the more water the treads have to disperse.

Worn treads have a greatly limited capacity to channel and hold water. This makes it easier for a wedge of water to build up in front of the tire. A badly worn tire can hydroplane at speeds below 30 miles per hour. To be sure your treads stay deep and useful as long as possible, follow the manufacturers' directions for rotating the tires and keeping them properly inflated.

Improve Your Odds

Your tires work hard to maintain their grip on the road surface, and rain makes the job that much harder. If your vehicle starts to hydroplane, you could have a serious accident. Learn to recognize the risks of hydroplaning. Know what to do if it happens to you and do your best to avoid it. It will improve your odds when you have to drive in wet weather.