

CLASSIC DRIVER

[This Christmas, discover the classic thrill of snow-driving](#)

Lead

As Simon de Burton points out, old-school motorists weren't afraid to drive in the snow simply because they didn't have four-wheel drive and electronic assistance; they just got on and did it...

If they really had to go somewhere in the snow, drivers just got into their cars and drove

I was in Iceland a few days ago for the launch of Land Rover's new 'Discovery Sport'. As my driving companion and I pushed on along the ice-packed gravel roads and tackled snow-covered inclines, we pondered the question of what people used to do in the days before four-wheel drive was readily available on mainstream vehicles - and quickly realised the answer: if they really had to go somewhere in the snow, drivers just got into their cars and drove.

Snow-driving for sporty sorts



After all, a relatively insignificant 30 years ago the only AWD vehicles that were readily available (in the UK, at least) were Land Rovers, with Mitsubishi Shoguns, Daihatsu FourTracks, Jeeps or Subarus being rare sights until at least the end of the '80s.

And of course, winters tended to be more severe in the 'old days', not least in the north of England where I spent the first few years of my life. Nevertheless, I remember 'snow-driving' being regarded as something of a sport by my car-mad mother, who would always make a point of going out in her Bentley R Type steel saloon whenever there had been a good dusting of the white stuff.



Nowadays, we're inclined to tuck our classics away in the depths of winter, not least to protect them from the vile, rust-inducing salt grit that many European highway authorities love to throw on the roads at the first inkling of frost.

But if you're prepared to ignore that, there are few better times to drive than during a white Christmas. I recall one

particularly notable run in a MK1 Golf GTi from London to North Yorkshire on Christmas Day 1995, in which the 250-mile journey was completed in little more than three hours on virtually traffic-free roads. It was bliss, like driving in the 1920s must have been, only with better surfaces.

Crisp snow under blue skies



These days, we live in the depths of England's Dartmoor where serious snow is relatively rare but, when it arrives, can be decidedly entertaining thanks to the many hills and the large amount of wind-swept, open countryside which can cause impressive drifts. When the snow has settled to a crisp blanket, the sky is blue and the sun is shining, however, it is difficult to resist the opportunity to do some 'impressive drifting' of one's own in a suitable classic.

Rear-engined cars such as the Porsches and VWs seen in our pictures make competent snowmobiles thanks to having plenty of weight over their driven wheels but, when it comes to gliding across the snow (in control, of course), lightness is king - which is probably why the woman standing beside the microcar at the top of Italy's 2,240-metre Passo Sella is looking so pleased with herself. And note the Beetle in the background.

Move over, modern cars



Air-cooled Citroëns (such as that Ami estate photographed from above) also make competent snow cars, a fact brought home to me when I was driving a Dyane 6 up a slush- and ice-covered incline that had already left many more luxurious machines strewn by the side of the

road. The Dyane did lose traction - but its gentle power delivery and low weight made it possible to leave it in first gear with the wheels spinning, open the door, get out and give it a helping push to the summit.

But, as the pictures show, old-school motorists simply weren't afraid to drive in the snow in the sort of cars that, today, we might consider completely unsuitable. Modern, rear-drive BMW, Jaguar and Mercedes models are among the first to slide to an ungraceful halt when challenged by a coating of powder - but, it seems, Pagoda SLs, 507s, 1800 saloons and MK2s just took it in their stride.

Stay cool; not chilly



So, if it snows this Christmas, we heartily recommend that you get classic driving as soon as possible. Just remember to take your shovel, and don't wear a summer dress like the girl with the Karmann Ghia.

That would just be silly. Not to mention chilly.

Gallery

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