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Driven to the limit by a covering of snow

Oh no, it's snow again.

Frederic Manby

was in it.

SOME countries handle snow better than we do in Britain. Actually, every country is better with snow than us, except maybe Saharan Africa.

Yet our snow is difficult. It is wetter than Nordic snow so it freezes up and gets tricky to drive on. Theirs is drier and they have spiked tyres and an aptitude for driving on low-friction surfaces.

John Matthews has been quite happy this week. OK, the film-maker *was* stranded in his Pennine home by shoulder-high drifts, but the good news is that a film he made about ice-driving in Norway in 2003, has been selling like the proverbial hot cakes.

Extreme Driving was his first break as an independent, and the graduate of Rishworth School, and St John's, York, went on to make acclaimed films, including a cracker on the Le Mans 24 Hour Race.



COOL RUNNING: Snow and ice driving comes easy to Scandinavians.

His ice tutor was John Haugland, renowned for his series of class wins in the RAC rally in a Skoda.

"We had our own frozen lake, a metre thick, and could drive as flat out as we liked and crash into snowdrifts."

Hmm. Fun. I've done that. One of the casualties was their four-wheel-drive Jaguar X-Type. "The Jag fell to bits basically – all the body panels fell off! It was there to be tested to destruction and that is what we did.

"Scandinavians make great rally drivers because they have this weather for half the year. As soon as it snows, they get into granny's rear-wheel-drive Volvo and go thrashing around the icy streets."

John, naturally, became something of a decent ice driver. His advice can fall on barren ears. "I saw a young lad trying to drive his Puma last night in the deep snow, and he crashed the back of his car into a wall. He did not

have a clue what he was doing and he did not want to listen to me either".

So, how's it done, John? "The problem in this weather is everyone hits the brakes." He advocates accelerating out of bends to give the car stability and momentum, but remember that too much gas in a rear-drive car will make it slew.

Got it? If in doubt, stay off the throttle, park up and be safe at home.

Survival advice from PR

agencies tends to follow sudden snowfall. You may look like the last of the Dorks at Number 44 when you load your car with emergency kit, but you'll be snug and secure if you are stranded. The best 4x4 grip in the county is no good if the road is blocked for hours by a crash.

Sensible precautions include food, non-alcoholic drinks, warm clothes, including clothing for head and feet and hands, a blanket, a strong shovel, a

torch, carpet mats to give the wheels temporary grip, a phone and charger, something to read, a tow-ropes. Vital: have plenty of fuel in the tank.

As John Matthews discovered, practise helps, and gives confidence. Most of us are not brilliant drivers in snow, and ice is even tougher. Read the conditions, stay well back from the vehicle in front so that you have space to brake safely or plan your move if they get stuck, do not corner quickly, brake gently, drive smoothly, beware of shiny roads because that could be "black" ice, do not be tempted to go as fast as other vehicles. They may be driven by an expert, perhaps not.

Tyres need plenty of tread but don't waste money getting winter tyres. Have your car serviced regularly. ■ *Extreme Driving*: £9.20 plus VAT and postage (£12.70 inclusive in the UK) from Bigger Picture 0161 234 0099 and www.big-pic.co.uk ■ Tuition: The IAM and RoSPA can help improve your car control and driving ability.

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