



Slip, Sliding Away  
by  
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In spite of what we had for the last few years, it looks like this year will bring us a normal Manitoba winter; snow, snow and, oh yeah, snow. And with that comes our favourite Winnipeg winter sport, no, not hockey. I'm talking about car bowling; the act of launching your car down an icy street to see how many other cars you can bounce off of. It can almost be considered an early winter tradition, as hundreds of motorists participate in it after the first serious snowfall alone, never mind the rest of winter. It is as if everyone forgets how to drive in winter.



A word to the wise, even though winter car bowlers are largely responsible for keeping hundreds of workers at Manitoba Public Insurance employed each year, they don't treat you like a valued customer. How do I know this? Persona experience, I'm sorry to say. I must admit to getting involved in the sport myself a couple of winters back. Unless, God forbid, something worse happens along the way, it will go down in history as my worst winter ever.

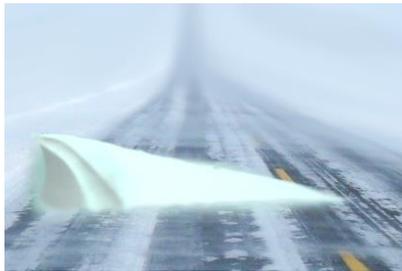
My story begins on a very snowy, blowy, November morning two years ago. It had been snowing since first light, and possibly earlier. The streets were slick and visibility was poor. I was heading to a lunch meeting on the other side of the city, all the while wondering why I was doing it. Traffic was crawling and it had already taken me more than forty five minutes just to get near into the downtown area. I could feel my tires begin to slide every time I applied the brakes and mind was screaming, "You shouldn't be here! Turn around and go home!"

Then it happened! The light turned red and the car in front of me hit the brakes. I dropped the car into neutral and began pumping the brakes, but the car kept inexorably sliding forward. It kept going, no matter what I did, gradually slowing, but not enough. At the last possible moment, the car ground to a stop, and the rear end swung out, hitting the panel truck beside me. Heavy sigh.

I got a broken tail light, a bent fender and a cracked bumper. He got some scratches in his paint. If it wasn't for the damage to my car, he wouldn't have had to bother with the ensuing MPI claim. As we were exchanging information, I hear someone yell, "Shit!" and turn to see a woman looking at the mangled front end of her car. She appeared to have hit the light standard.

That was November, also known as round one. December sailed along fairly smoothly. Then came January; round two. I was driving around the south Perimeter highway. There had been a light snowfall and a north wind was sending it drifting across the highway but, thus far, there was no accumulation on the roads. I was following a semi-trailer, coming up on the lights for the La Salle turn off. The light was red and the truck in front of me was slowing down. Knowing

how long it takes for those big rigs to get going once they've stopped, I pulled into the left lane, intending to get in front of him when the light changed. Unfortunately, the light changed before we came to a stop and the truck began to speed up. Now I am stuck in the left lane beside him, picking up speed faster than he was, but not as quickly as I had intended. It had never been my plan to be in a race with a large tractor-trailer.



That's when I saw the snow drift. It was just on the other side of the railroad tracks we were about to cross, directly in front of me and piled up higher than the curb, right in front of my left front tire. I took my foot off the gas and began applying the brakes, but it was too late. Unlike my September accident, which appeared to happen in slow motion, this one happened at lightning speed. I hit the snow drift and the next thing I knew I was skidding sideways in the other lane. I couldn't see the truck so I could only assume that it was following me, mere inches from slamming into my passenger side. There was a snow embankment flying by in front of my windshield so I hammered the gas pedal and drove straight into it. It was rock solid and my car came to a sudden stop. Surprisingly, the airbag didn't deploy. I heard the big rig blow past behind me.

My front end was a mess, but I managed to avoid becoming a hood ornament on a very large truck, so that had to be good. A RCMP highway patrol officer gave me a ride to the nearest truck stop where I could make all the necessary phone calls.

So there's the story of my car bowling experience. My car was fixed, again, and I have been paying for it ever since. All my merits were wiped out and I ended up with two demerits on my license, plus an additional \$60 a month on my combined license and registration for the last two years. Maybe it will go down next year.

Oh yeah, I also received a letter from MPI advising me what a danger on the road I am, something that is a source of irritation every time I look in my rear view mirror and see someone following me on an icy road so close that I can't see their headlights, face downturned as they update their Facebook profile.



Ladies and gentlemen. Winter driving in Manitoba is challenging. Trust me, I know. Icy roads and drifting snow can bring you up close and personal with your neighbouring driver, or any number of solid objects, when you least expect it. The very least you could do is give it the respect it deserves. Slow down, pay attention to warning signs, give a decent amount of space between you and other drivers (sometimes what you think is a safe amount may not be, trust me), and for God's sake, put your damn phone down. That call is not as important as you think it is.

One more thing worth noting. After every heavy snowstorm, I have always made note of what vehicles most often get stuck in snowbanks and ditches. More often than not, they aren't small cars, but large four wheel drive trucks and SUVs. Somehow, having a four wheel drive vehicle makes a person think that they are immune to getting stuck.



Sorry, but that is far from the truth. True, you will not get stuck as easily as those without four wheel drive, and used with caution, they are very handy to have in a Manitoba winter. But that four wheel drive option, combined with overconfidence can easily get you stuck in places no one else would even consider going. And four wheel drive will not help you at all on ice. Sorry.

It looks like it is going to be one of those winters so, unless you enjoy the sport of car bowling, be careful out there. Personally, I have learned to be much more respectful of Manitoba's winters and from now on only plan to venture out in poor weather with extreme caution and then only when there is no other option. I have learned that Manitoba Public Insurance has no sympathy for those who were in the wrong place at the wrong time, and one close encounter with a fast moving semi-trailer is more than enough for me. I want to be around to enjoy another Manitoba summer. You may want to do the same.

