

Winter Tire Rules

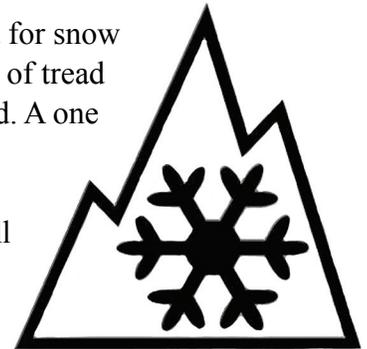
Are winter tires required in Germany?

In November 2010, a new German federal law went into effect that specifically mandates the use of winter tires when conditions are icy. European winter tires have two kinds of markings: a snowflake for snow tires or M+S for tires designed to work in “matsch und schnee” — mud and snow. All-season or all-weather tires may also have the M+S marking and are acceptable for winter driving. The laws also apply to motorbikes, trucks and buses, regardless of whether the driver is the owner or is renting the vehicle. While there is no specific time period during which winter tires are required, many German drivers use the rule of thumb “von O bis O” – from O to O – meaning snow tires should be put on in October and remain on until Ostern (Easter).

If your winter vacation takes you to another country, e.g. Austria or Switzerland, check what these countries' rules are. The European Road Safety website is a good resource: http://ec.europa.eu/transport/road_safety/going_abroad/index_en.htm.

What types of tires are best for winter driving?

Only snow tires without spikes or studs are allowed in Germany. Tires designed for snow function better than multi-purpose tires. All tires must have at least 1.6 millimeters of tread depth, but for maximum safety tires with less than 4 millimeters should be replaced. A one euro coin can be used for a quick “tread check.” When placed in the tire’s tread, you should not be able to see the golden edge of the coin. If you can, the tire needs to be replaced. Winter tires offer better protection than all-season models, and it’s best if all four tires match. The German automobile club ADAC recommends using tires that carry the “three peak mountain” seal shown here, the mark of snow tires that meet the highest standards.



Can tire chains be used in Germany?

In some areas snow chains may be required, but only as directed by road signs or police. An example of a German sign for areas requiring chains is at left. The maximum speed while driving a vehicle with chains is 50 kilometers per hour.

What are the penalties for driving without winter tires?

If you get caught driving without the correct tires on your vehicle, you can get a 40-euro ticket. If you cause an accident or create a road hazard or traffic jam as a result of not having the correct tires on your vehicle you can expect an 80-euro ticket and a point against your license. Police can assign blame to a motorist involved in a winter accident whose car does not have snow tires installed, regardless of who caused the accident. In addition, some insurance companies may deny coverage to motorists driving with summer tires on winter roads.

Drivers who are unsure about winter tire requirements can contact the USAG Stuttgart vehicle registration at 431-2833/civ. 07031-15-2833 or the Safety Office at 431-3132/civ. 07031-15-3132.

Pay attention with rental cars:

Don't take for granted that rental cars are equipped with winter tires during the winter season. It is always your responsibility as the driver to ensure that the vehicle you operate is in a roadworthy condition, which includes suitable tires. You should clearly request winter tires when you reserve the car, and verify they are installed before accepting the car. Rental companies may charge an extra fee for winter tires.

Sources: AE Pamphlet 190-34 (Drivers Handbook and Examination Manual for Germany)