



Tips for Mountain Driving

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Introduction

- “The job is never complete”
- Driving in the mountains should not be a hair-raising experience
- Yes, know the basics, but too much fear can make you overanxious.
- Relax and enjoy the ride!



Why is mountain driving a challenge

- Two things: grades and curves
- Both are made challenging due to sheer mass of your vehicle. That's physics in action for you
- Increasing traffic
- Many mountain passes are narrow
- Shoulders are often poorly maintained or missing entire
- Many of these roads have few, if any, passing lanes



Some basics . . .

- **Find the balance between being fearful and staying focused**
- **Watch your weight!** If you're towing or hauling too much weight, this is where things can get problematic.
- **Trip Planning:** plan your trip so that you minimize risks and congestion. Arrive at more challenging stretches, like mountain passes, at days and times when traffic is as light as possible.
- **Slow down and have patience:** You'll get to your destination a few minutes later, but you and your family will be safe
- **Know the capabilities of your vehicles:**
 - Understand how your tow vehicle and trailer will operate when you ascend and descend steep hills. Adjust how you drive to the capacity of your vehicles.
 - *Most importantly, are your brakes in good working order?*
- **Not all tow vehicles are created equal:** Understand those differences and adjust your driving.



What's the greater challenge, driving up a pass or going down?

Driving an incline

- As you're climbing up, gravity will take care of slowing you down.
- Know the capabilities of your vehicles. Everything changes for your tow vehicle when pulling a heavy trailer up a hill at altitude.
- Example: eastbound on I-70, climbing Vail Pass. You encounter a slow-moving truck in the right lane.
- Sometimes, it's just safer to stay in the right lane, even if it means following a slow-moving truck. Don't try to overtake other large rigs, unless you're 100% sure you can do that safely and relatively fast.
- *Watch your temperature gauges* closely when ascending steep hills, especially on hot, summer days.



Descending



- Driving downhill, gravity pulls your vehicle down. You accelerate more and more.
- You must **drive** in the mountains. Don't let your vehicle just take you over the pass. Requires skill, focus and knowledge of your equipment.
- Important: match speed to the capabilities of vehicles and road conditions so that you can safely come to a stop or avoid an obstacle while being in control.
- Weight of vehicles and laws of physics want to push you down the hill. Counter these forces using the technology in vehicles. Includes brakes in vehicles and deployment of technology in tow vehicle which includes a combination of engine braking and transmission.
- There are few absolute rules for mountain driving. One that comes closest: **do not ride your brakes when descending a long hill**
 - Keep speed down to stay in control. Watch the speed limit signs – they can warn you of upcoming challenges
 - Use technology in tow vehicle and apply brakes as sparingly as possible
 - Use brakes to bring speed down below target level and then release them so that the brakes have a chance to cool
 - Use brake controller to engage trailer brakes

Driving two lane roads



- Colorado mountains means two-lane highways. ***Even some of the busiest highways are two-lane roads***
 - These roads are where you'll encounter most challenging grades and curves
 - Many have passing lanes, but they're still two-lane roads
 - Be aware of your surroundings
- Be aware of traffic behind you
 - Use camera or mirrors to always know about the traffic behind
 - When driving a road that doesn't provide frequent passing lanes, make it a practice to pull over when it's safe to do so and let traffic clear from behind.
 - Do this to be courteous, but also for safety. If it's unsafe for them, it's unsafe for you.
- When pulling off a road to let traffic pass:
 - Only do it when you can bring your speed down to near zero and when you won't hit a deep shoulder causing damage.
 - Pull over far enough so vehicles behind can pass safely. Get totally off the road.
- On curves, avoid getting off the pavement onto the shoulder. Many of the roads do not have adequate shoulders or there may be a drop off from the pavement that can damage vehicles. Another good reason to keep your speed under control

Additional Tips for Mountain Driving

- **GPS may not always work consistently in mountains.** Study map before trip to anticipate intersections and turns. **AVOID DISTRACTIONS!**
- **Watch carefully for wildlife especially for deer early in the morning or late at night.** Another good reason to watch your speed, especially around blind corners
- **Be mindful of changing weather conditions.** Especially on declines, if it's raining, allow additional space for braking. Allow plenty of space to the vehicle in front and avoid quick stops
- **Turn on tow/haul mode.** Driving in the mountains is when you really find out about advantages of this technology. Provides more torque when climbing and more engine braking when descending. If driving a diesel it might engage the exhaust brake.
- Truckers tell you to descend the hill in same gear as ascended. **Learn to use the manual shifting capability even with an automatic transmission.** Proper use of gears helps keep speed under control. General rule: take full advantage of tow vehicle's engine and transmission to minimize use of brake pedal. Watch tachometer when using manual shifting.
- **Know your escape route**
- **Seek out other experienced drivers**

