

All season M/S tires permitted, but not ticket-proof
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As snow continues to fall with no expectations of spring in the near future, hazardous road conditions remain and drivers are charged with making sure their vehicles are equipped for the weather, especially with suitable winter tires.

However, with two sets of guidelines to sort through, deciding between winter and all-season tires may seem confusing to some.

When making that decision, drivers have two things to consider: Army regulation and German law, though neither one mandates one type of tire over the other.

According to AER 190-1, the U.S. Army Europe document detailing requirements for personally owned vehicles, "in high-snow areas, vehicles must have snow tires mounted. In areas not regarded as "snow prone," the use of all-season tires with an M/S label or a snowflake label are acceptable. Vehicle owners should check with an authorized tire dealer for any unique restrictions in their area. Winter tires should have a tread depth of at least 3 millimeters."

Though snow can be expected in the Hohenfels area from October until at least the end of March, all-season M/S (mud and snow) tires are still considered acceptable, according to the U.S. Army Garrison Hohenfels Provost Marshal's Office, who themselves use all-season M/S tires on Military Police vehicles. Most lightweight TMP vehicles also have all-season M/S tires, according to George Braun, TMP transportation supervisor.

To make matters even more confusing, there are some American tires that say "All Season" but do not have the M/S designation. These are considered unacceptable for winter driving by both Army regulation and German law, said Keith Dreibelbis, Car Care Center manager.

Though all-season M/S tires are permitted, winter tires still outperform all-season M/S tires in especially cold, snowy or icy conditions, said the Police Inspectorate in Parsberg. A letter addressed to the Hohenfels PMO from the Police Inspectorate in Parsberg reminded drivers of the need for proper tires in inclement weather and pointed out the advantages of winter tires.

"Modern winter tires already guarantee a significantly better traction at temperatures of seven degree Celsius (44 degrees Fahrenheit) or below, even on dry road surfaces. On snow/ice-covered roads the winter tires outclass regular tires by far," said the letter signed by Peter Gotteswinter, chief of the Police Inspectorate in Parsberg.

"However, the law does not dictate the use of winter tires," said the letter. "The German Road Traffic Ordinance says: 'The equipment of a motor vehicle has to be adjusted to the weather/road conditions. This in particular includes proper tires and antifreeze fluid for windshield wipers.'"

Though neither Army regulation nor German law mandate the use of winter tires, users of all-season M/S tires are not be completely immune from receiving a ticket for not using them, said Maj. Michael Zink, garrison provost marshal.

The letter from the Parsberg police goes on to say that when wintry road conditions prevail, if improper tires (i.e. summer tires or worn winter tires) are being used and the driver exhibits poor driving skills such as spinning, fishtailing, skidding and loss of traction, a violation of the legal requirement to equip the vehicle with proper winter gear

can be punished by fines ranging from 20 to 60 euros, and insurance companies may impose their own penalties if improper tires were found to be the cause of the accident. The bottom line is: while all season M/S tires are considered acceptable by both Army and German regulations, if you are in an accident off-post and you have all season M/S tires, the other driver has snow tires and it seems road conditions were the prevailing factor in the accident, you might get a ticket, said Zink.

Thomas Niebler, on-post POV inspector, agreed that winter tires are the ideal option. “All-season (with M/S) tires are allowed, but the safest option is summer (tires) for summer and winter for winter. All-seasons are not really either,” said Niebler, adding that drivers of SUVs should especially consider winter tires because the heavier the vehicle, the more traction it needs.

“A lot of people with four-wheel drive think they don’t need winter tires, but they especially do. The difference is the rubber mix. If the temperature is lower than seven degrees (Celsius, 44 degrees Fahrenheit) the tire gets hard and starts losing grip,” said Niebler.

Niebler also said winter drivers should ensure they have the always-mandatory first aid kit and warning triangles in their car, as well as snow chains and a warning vest if driving in Austria.

CUTLINE:

winter tire.jpg

This winter tire, marked with a snowflake, has treads and a rubber mix that help it grip cold roads better than all-season or summer tires.



MS tire.jpg

This all season tire is considered acceptable for winter driving because it has an M/S designation on the side, but winter tires have better treads, better rubber and are still superior on cold, snowy roads. While all season M/S tires are allowed, they still might not protect a driver from getting a ticket for not having “proper winter tires.” All season tires without an M/S or a snowflake are not acceptable for winter driving.



summer tire.jpg

This summer tire has less tread and harder rubber than an all season M/S or winter tire. Summer tires are considered unacceptable for winter driving by both Army regulations and German law.

