



Car Survival

By MSgt Bryan L. Kasmenn, Cannon AFB, N.M.



While a kit must be tailored to your individual or family needs, there are some basic items that should be considered mandatory. These include a spare tire, jack, chains (that fit), jumper cables, road flares, some repair tools, and an ice scraper. Next would be a

The top three places people spend most of their time are home, work, and their vehicle. Now for some of us, home and work rank in the top two spots, but our cars always seem to make it to third place. And whether it is going to work, around town, a day off, or on vacation, it's usually our cars that are taking us there. With all this time we spend in our vehicles you would think people would include more safety equipment in their trunks than just a jack and spare tire, but they don't.

Even with all this time spent in our cars, motorists still find themselves poorly prepared for most roadside emergencies, weather hazards, or vehicle accidents that may occur. When this happens, even minor incidents can become life threatening. A few years ago this lack of preparation almost cost a New Mexico woman her life. She was on her way to Santa Fe, N.M., for a ski vacation when her car went off the side of the road. She was

stranded for several days in her car, suffering from dehydration, hypothermia, frostbite, and hunger. Purely by accident, she was discovered by a road crew who rushed her to a hospital where her injuries were treated. If she had done a little preparation before her trip, such as making a car survival kit, her life-threatening situation may have turned into just a minor inconvenience.

The first step in preparation is to admit that something could happen. You can't start to solve any type of problem without realizing that there is one. Then look at the risks and possibilities of where you go in your vehicle. I travel a lot between Cannon Air Force Base, N.M., and Phoenix, Ariz. This means my kit has supplies and equipment to handle local emergencies as well as the extremes found in the mountains and desert. Once you have determined your risks, you can outfit your vehicle with the equipment that will make your emergency more survivable.



good first aid kit that can treat both major and minor injuries. A handful of Band-Aids just won't help when a serious laceration or broken bone is involved. Plus don't forget any prescriptions that your family has to have (e.g., an extra asthma inhaler). Finally, there are your survival-oriented items such as a flashlight, wool blankets, candles, matches, heavy rope, folding shovel, work gloves, large trash bags, brightly colored scarf/handkerchief, mirror or reflective solar shade, and water. Sealed water has a shelf life of 6 months, so date and mark it. Each of these items meets multiple needs in personal protection or signaling. Remember,

these are only basic vehicle survival items. Depending on where you're going and your vehicle's storage space, you may want to add more items. Some nice-to-have items are sleeping bags, extra clothing, billed and warm hats, a brightly colored plastic tarp, personal medications, and foods that are high in carbohydrates (e.g., hard candy and granola bars).

Now that you have some car survival equipment you just need to remember a few safety tips on how to use it all. If you're stranded in your vehicle, do not leave; stay with it. Check and treat any injuries. Tie a signal flag (your bright scarf/handkerchief) to the antenna. To insulate yourself from the cold, use clothing, paper, maps, and any other suitable items. Check and clear your exhaust system of snow before running your heater. In the cold, run your engine for 5 minutes every 30 minutes or for 10 minutes every 60 minutes. Just make sure your timing coincides with news broadcasts on the radio. While running your engine, ensure that you have adequate ventilation (e.g., window open 2 to 3 inches). Ventilation is also important when using a candle or chemical fuel. Do not fall asleep with the engine running. In extreme heat, use your billed hat. Tie a tarp or blanket above the vehicle to protect the passenger area from the sun's rays. This creates a layer of shade above the vehicle and may cool the temperature down by 10 degrees. If you decide to run your vehicle's air conditioner, follow the same procedures for running a vehicle in the cold.

No matter what the temperature or weather is, stay hydrated to help maintain your body's normal temperature. When you have



enough water, food will also help maintain your temperature in the cold. If a vehicle passes, signal it by using your flares, reflective material (vehicle mirror, kit mirror, or reflective solar shade), or horn.

Armed with your car survival kit and little knowledge (cut this article out and put it in your glove box), you should be able to handle most emergencies from Mother Nature or mankind.

Whether it's an accident, mechanical failure, or a true survival situation, your attitude will make the ultimate difference. Be sure to include a little positive attitude and a lot of safety common sense in your newly made car survival kit. Finally, be sure to take a moment after an emergency occurs and **S.T.O.P.** (Stop, Think, Observe, and Proceed) in a safe and logical manner. 