



## Dangers on the road: skids

Ninety per cent of all road accidents involve a skid of some sort. The fundamental problem is that most drivers don't even know what a skid feels like until they find themselves on a crowded street, swerving<sup>1</sup> to avoid someone who has just run out in front of them. Or when they suddenly notice stationary traffic ahead on the motorway and slam on the brakes at 85 mph. It does not have to be icy: rain, spilt diesel, loose gravel,<sup>2</sup> fallen leaves or mud on the road all greatly reduce grip, and even on a dry surface in high summer you can find yourself in a skid if you exceed the capabilities of your car's tyres with speed, harsh<sup>3</sup> steering or braking. Many drivers tend to think of a skid as "brake failure" when in fact the situation is really a failure of the driver to understand the traction conditions and to drive accordingly.

As you gain experience, you can sense earlier when a skid is developing, giving you precious extra time in which to react, and it gradually becomes instinctive.

In a car that is oversteering, the correct reaction is to come off the accelerator, clutch<sup>4</sup> and brakes, and wait for the wheels to regain their grip on the road surface, while steering the same way your rear end is sliding, which is usually the direction in which you actually want to go. This means that when the tyres do regain traction, the steering will correct itself and you will drive out of the skid. With understeer, again the idea is to come off the brakes and throttle while continuing to steer the way you want to go, perhaps also reducing the amount of steering you have applied, until the front tyres regain effective grip. Emergency braking is necessary in many situations. The front wheels cannot steer unless they are rolling, and if you stamp on the brakes so that they lock up, you will simply slide straight on in whatever direction you are already travelling. The solution is to brake firmly for a second to slow the car, then come off the brakes for a second to regain steering control, then brake again, then come off again and so on. Cadence braking requires you to do this yourself, whereas ABS automatically does it for you.



### GLOSSARY

- 1** changing direction suddenly
- 2** small stones
- 3** rough and sharp
- 4** device that connects and disconnects the engine and the gears

### ACTIVITIES

**1** Answer the following questions.

- 1 What are the main causes of a skid?
- 2 Why is braking dangerous under such circumstances?
- 3 What can you do if your car is oversteering?
- 4 And if it is understeering?
- 5 What is the function of ABS?

**2** In the text, find the equivalents of the following Italian words and expressions.

- |                             |                       |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 Pedoni .....              | 5 Frizione .....      |
| 2 Ghiaino .....             | 6 Sovrasterzare ..... |
| 3 Trazione anteriore .....  | 7 Sottosterzare ..... |
| 4 Trazione posteriore ..... | 8 Acceleratore .....  |

**3** What can you do to avoid a skid? List the main steps.