

Performance Tires

Performance tires are a compromise for winter. They often feature shallow tread depths with smaller gaps between tread blocks; the blocks squirm less and are more stable at speed, but they also offer less traction in snow. The higher speed ratings in this group (up to V and W for sustained speeds beyond 240 km/h) often require a harder tread compound and more rigid sidewalls for stability, both of which can reduce traction on uncleared roads.

Many tires in this group have asymmetric tread designs. On the inside of the tread, the blocks are closed -- closer together so the tire performs like an all-season on pavement. On the exterior side of the tread, the design is more open, with features that bite in snow, just like a winter tire. Uneven tire wear is more common with this design and tire rotation can be tricky because the tire cannot be reversed to correct a wear issue: the inside has to stay on the inside.

Selection of a tire with excellent traction in snow is less of a concern with recent performance automobiles because all-wheel-drive has become very common, and it dramatically improves the vehicle's ability to plough out of deep snow. However rear-wheel-drive vehicles used in the snow belt will likely want to stick with the tires in this group that are better in snow, or switch to a lower speed rating, good handling tire in the passenger car and minivan section.

Prices are for tires in the 225/45R17 size typical of cars like the Volkswagen GTI and some C-class Mercedes. Tire sizes and prices in this segment are dictated mainly by stylists who have gone completely nuts; where possible, APA recommends switching to a smaller rim diameter and more conservative, narrower tire size. Traction will improve a bit and you'll save money and reduce damage to tires and wheels in winter.

Top Rated

Bridgestone Blizzak LM-60

Price: \$313



High quality construction. H-rated, a superior choice for dry pavement handling. Relatively quiet for this class of tire, and a bit softer riding than the Dunlop Winter Sport 3D. \$50 mail-in rebate when you buy four tires. Expensive in Canada; Bridgestone sells it for less to US tire dealers.

Dunlop SP Winter Sport 3D

Price: \$307



Performance similar to the Bridgestone LM-60 at a slightly lower price point. Convenient \$80 instant rebate when you buy four tires.

Pirelli Winter 210 Sottozero Series II

Price: \$280



Asymmetric tread pattern. Optimized for dry pavement handling and competent on ice. Offered in H, V and W speed ratings, depending on the tire size. Suitable for all-wheel-drive platforms in the snow belt, but most rear drive vehicles will do better with a tire that offers more snow traction. High quality construction. Expensive. Available as a runflat tire for BMWs and other vehicles with no spare. \$70 mail-in rebate when you buy four tires.

Toyo Observe Garit KX

Price: \$290



Best performance in this group on snow and ice but not as optimized for handling on cleared roads. A good choice among the tires in this group for a rear-wheel-drive vehicle. Very long wearing for a performance winter tire. Expensive. \$50 to \$80 mail-in rebate when you buy four tires. Aggressive drivers could look elsewhere.

Very Good

Goodyear Ultra Grip GW3

Price: \$320



Quality European construction, made in Germany. Superior performance on dry or wet roads, but not optimized for deep snow. Expensive. Convenient \$80 instant rebate when you buy four tires.

Michelin Pilot Alpin PA3

Price: \$297



Asymmetric tread pattern. Optimized for dry pavement handling, but not optimized for snow due to shallow tread depth and narrow openings between the tread blocks. High quality construction. Tricky tire mileage warranty requires the tread to be worn nearly to a banana peel before you can collect.

Michelin Primacy Alpin

Price: \$289



Directional tread pattern that has more grip than the Pilot Alpin PA3; some larger Primacy sizes overlap with the Pilot Alpin PA3. High quality construction. \$70 mail-in rebate when you buy four tires. Listed in a runflat version for BMW and other vehicles with no spare, but availability is uneven; the pricing is slightly higher than the Continental TS810 runflat, with a more aggressive tread that has better traction in snow. \$70 mail-in rebate when you buy four tires. Tricky mileage warranty requires the tread to be worn to 2/32" before you can collect - that's too low for a winter tire.

Good

Continental ContiWinter Contact TS810

Price: \$217



Asymmetric tread pattern. Optimized for dry pavement handling. Quiet. Designed for high-end European cars with all-wheel drive; a compromise for rear-wheel drive applications in the snow belt. An appealing alternative to the Pirelli Winter 210 Sotto Zero Series II at a cheaper price. Available in a runflat version for BMW and other vehicles without a spare; runflat pricing very competitive. \$100 mail-in rebate when you buy four.

Continental ContiWinter Contact TS810 Sport

Price: \$294



V-rated version of the TS 810. Asymmetric tread pattern. Optimized for dry pavement handling. Quiet. Designed for European cars, ideally limited to all-wheel drive vehicles in areas with heavy snowfall. \$100 mail-in rebate when you buy four tires.

Dunlop SP Winter Sport M3

Price: \$259



Fairly noisy and firm riding; suited to aggressive driving styles. Available as a runflat tire for BMW and other vehicles with no spare; the best runflat tire in this group for deep snow. Convenient \$80 instant rebate when you buy four tires.

Goodyear Ultra Grip Performance 2

Price: \$327



Asymmetric model. Optimized for driving on dry or wet pavement, but not optimized for ice or snow. Limited size availability. \$100 instant rebate when you buy four tires.

Average

Hankook Icebear W300

Price: \$318



Asymmetric tread pattern. Optimized for dry pavement handling, but not aggressive enough to be ideal for winter in snow belt areas; better suited to an all-wheel-drive vehicle. This tire has been discontinued; limited availability.

Below Average

Triangle TR777

Price: \$124



Modern tread design. Variable tire uniformity. Despite the low price, a tire to avoid as the APA has no track record on the manufacturer. There are better choices for a high performance car. Extraordinarily low prices, particularly in large sizes. Discontinued but still available in some sizes. Make sure your leasing company will accept them if you turn in your performance car equipped with this or a similar private importer Chinese tire.