



Hanging Iron

Written by Dustin Hustad

A Driver's Guide for Chaining Tires

What follows are some tips for "hanging iron."

Start with a thorough inspection of your chains. If you were not the last person to use the chains, then you need to pull them all off and inspect every link and cam before you leave the yard. The side of a mountain is no place to discover all your cross links are broken, or that you don't have enough chains to do the job. Also, familiarize yourself with the chain laws in the states you will be driving in as they are all different.

As you approach the snow zone, get as much information as you can. Try to find out from drivers going the other direction (on the CB) what the conditions are like. Where does the snow stop and start? Is anyone having trouble making it over the hills? How full is the chain up area?

Find a place as far away from the road as you can to put on chains. Use an on ramp just before the chain up area and try to get as far off the road as possible. Every year you hear about someone getting killed or severely injured while they were putting on chains because a passing car or truck ran into them. Make yourself as visible as possible.



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I always wear a reflective vest and point a flashlight towards traffic.

Slow down as you approach the chain up area and stay as far away from people putting on their chains as is reasonable. Also be very aware of the spray coming off your tires. You don't want to be the guy that soaks everyone. When you park, be sure to leave room in front of you so the guy ahead has room to back up. I like to install my chains on an on ramp because you are usually pointed down hill. This allows me to drive forward onto my chains on the drive tires, making them easier to fasten. Once I get them on, I hang my drag chains, and back over them for the same reason.

Get your chains as tight as possible. Then drive a short distance and tighten them again. If there are extra links hanging on the end of the rails, secure them by hooking up a bungee cord and running it from the loose links across the wheel to the chain rail across from it. A bungee cord or two from rail to rail across the wheel (not the tire) can help a little, (if a cross link breaks, they can take up a little of the slack). But if the chains are tight, you don't really need them. When you remove your chains, make sure you are pointed down hill, or the snow is not too deep where you are. There is nothing worse than getting all your chains put away, only to get stuck.

Speed kills chains. Your chains will not last more than a few miles when driving over 50 mph. If you have to run a long way with chains on, you could use them up really quick. I like to leave both windows down just a little bit, so I can hear if a cross link breaks. They can do a lot of damage very quickly so I try to stop as soon as possible. If it's just one broken cross link, you might be able to secure it with a bungee, tighten the cams, and keep going.

Chain Up Equipment

Nobody likes putting on tire chains, but they are an essential part of winter driving in the mountains (and sometimes the lowlands). Warm clothing that keeps you dry makes the job a lot easier. Here are some suggestions for clothing:

- Hat (I like one with a bill that goes all the way around, water running down your neck is no fun.)
- Rain coat (mine has cuffs on the inside to keep the rusty water on the chains from running up my arm and staining my shirt.)
- Gloves (I wear rubber gloves, you lose some dexterity, but not as much as when your fingers freeze.)
- Boots (I oil my work boots and use them unless the snow is really wet, then I change in to insulated, slip on rubber boots.)

Having the right tools will also make the job a lot easier. Here are a couple of suggestions:

- Flash light (I wrap a "Snake Light" around my neck and put the bulb under my chin so the light is where I need it and my hands are free.)
- Chain wrench (always have extras.)
- Bungee cords (the more the better.)
- Chain extenders (they are two chain links with a hook to use when chains are just a little too short.)
- Fifth wheel pin puller (handy for getting between the tires.)

Guest author, Dustin Hustad, has driven for Oak Harbor Freight Lines, Inc. for nearly 20 years and is described as one of their best drivers. TIRES appreciates his willingness to share his take on safety.