

WORST-CASE SCENARIO®

HOW TO SURVIVE IF YOUR CAR CAREENS DOWN A MOUNTAINSIDE

1 Apply firm and steady braking pressure.

Do not slam on the brakes as you leave the roadway and begin traveling down the slope. If you lock up your brakes, the wheels lose traction and may cause the vehicle to skid sideways, increasing the risk of a rollover.

2 Maintain a firm grip on the steering wheel.

The car is likely to bounce wildly and severely jostle you in your seat. Place your hands at the ten and two o'clock positions. Keep your thumbs outside the steering wheel: If the car hits an object, the force may yank the steering wheel around, injuring your thumbs or arms.

3 Point the car downhill.

Keep the car facing and traveling straight downhill, continuing to apply steady braking pressure. A vehicle is much more likely to roll over if it is sideways across a hill. Though you may be able to survive a rollover, you will have no control and will not be able to stop the car.

4 Steer.

Keep the front wheels turned in the direction the car is sliding/moving in order to increase traction and make braking and steering more effective.

5 Downshift.

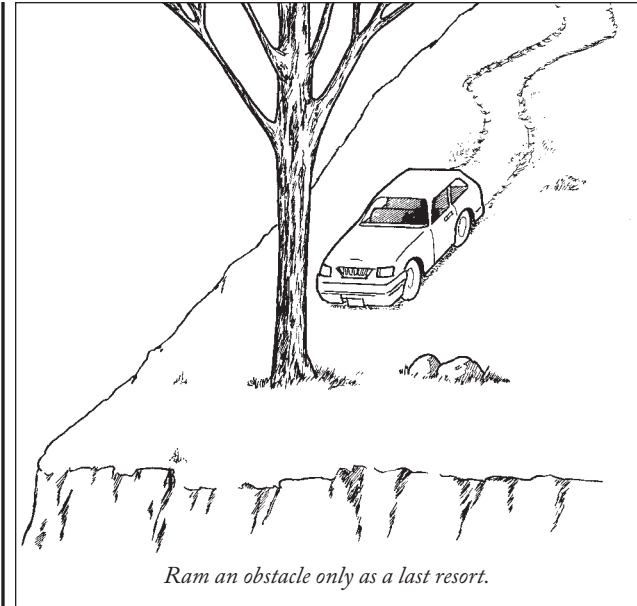
Once you regain control of the car and it is facing downhill, use engine braking to slow the car's momentum. If the car has a manual transmission, keep your foot off the gas and downshift to first gear. For an automatic, keep your foot off the gas and shift the car from drive to first gear or the lowest gear available. Continue to apply just enough braking pressure to control your speed, but not enough to lock up your wheels.

6 Turn the wheel in the same direction the car is sliding to regain control.

On a steep downslope, the weight of the car will transfer to the front axle as you brake, possibly causing the tail to spin out and around toward the front. To regain traction, turn the wheel in the direction the vehicle is sliding, then apply the gas lightly.

7 Use steady braking pressure to stop the car.

Once the car has stopped moving, apply the emergency brake and get out. If you cannot stop the car using the brakes, go to step 8.



8 Attempt to “high-center” the car.

If you are not able to stop the car in time to avoid an approaching cliff, look for a large rock or fallen tree. Drive over the object centered between your front wheels to try to force the car to “bottom out” and get stuck before the rear wheels roll over the obstacle. This maneuver will typically work only with an obstacle that is about one foot high. If you cannot high-center the car, continue to the next step.

9 Ram an obstacle.

Slow the car to 20 mph or less to increase your chance of survival. Ram the car head on into a tree or large

boulder to stop your progress. Do not turn the car across the slope and ram the object sideways; you risk a rollover. You (and all passengers) must be wearing a seat belt and the car must have an air bag for you and your front-seat passenger. Ram the obstacle only as a last resort.

Be Aware

A vehicle's antilock braking system is usually not effective off-road: ABSs monitor wheel speed, and will apply the brakes only enough to equalize the rotation of the wheels, not to stop them from spinning when there is no traction. You will need to pump the brakes and to be aware that the braking system might apply pressure unequally to the wheels.

HOW TO GET THE CAR BACK TO THE ROAD

1 Assess damage to vehicle.

Once you have stopped the car, get out and inspect the vehicle. Check for brake fluid (red liquid pooling under the car) or damaged steering components (broken rods hanging down from the insides of the front wheels). Do not drive the car if it has a broken axle or damaged steering components, or if it is leaking brake fluid.

2 Walk your intended route before driving it.

Look for ditches, obstacles, and cliffs that may prevent you from getting back to the roadway.

3 Drive slowly.

Use light acceleration and braking and smooth steering. Keep your speed to 5 mph or less, terrain permitting. Follow the off-roading maxim: "As slow as you can, as fast as you must."

4 Monitor the path in front of you.

Look downslope to determine where you are headed and when you will need to stop the car. On a mountainside, the car will require 10 to 20 times its normal dry-pavement stopping distance.

5 Look for a switchback.

Most steep mountain roads contain numerous switchbacks, or sharp turns that take you across the slope but at a slightly higher or lower elevation (depending on your direction of travel). If you see a lower section of the road cutting across the mountainside ahead of you, attempt to steer the car back onto the asphalt at the next opportunity. Watch for steep drop-offs that are common in mountain road cuts, however.

Be Aware

- Most passenger cars will roll side over side on any slope greater than 30 degrees.
- When your air bag deploys, fuel to the engine will likely be cut off, making further controlled driving impossible.