

The Snow Tire FAQ



Real World Snow Tire Tests – 2002

Nokian WR – Our first Light Truck Tire!

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Background

As editor of [The Snow Tire FAQ](#), I have received many questions about snow tires. 95% of the questions ask the same thing, "What snow tires should I buy for my car?" In December of 2000, I realized that the variety of vehicles was growing, but my experience wasn't. So started the annual Real World Snow Tire Tests.

In 2001, tires from three manufactures were tested, [Nokian](#), [Dunlop](#), and [Vredestein](#). This year, due to several factors, including the lack of inclimate weather, only one set of tires was reviewed, the Nokian WR. This is the first time The Snow Tire FAQ has reviewed an SUV tire.

A Winter of Wacky Weather and Other Things

In Rochester, NY, the winter of 2002 may well be remembered as "the winter that wasn't." For the most part, the temperatures stayed above freezing, and the little snow that did fall melted quickly away. It was very rare for snow to pile up on any roads. Ironically, Buffalo, which is about 75 miles west of Rochester, had a year of record setting snow falls.

The good weather, for many people, was good news. For our team of tire testers, it wasn't. Several tests we had hoped to do this year were put off. We had planned a shoot-out between last year's tires. It was to be run with nearly identical cars on a local Rally-cross track. The warm weather meant that the track never froze, and was unusable. If there is any good news in this, it is that the owner of the track is very interested to have us test on it. He is a rallyist who is always looking for a better snow tire to give him that extra edge.

This past year also saw a couple of life changing events in my own life: my daughter started school, and we moved out to the suburbs. The latter largely affected the amount of time I had to coordinate this year's tire tests. I knew the packing was going to be a big task, but I never realized how long the unpacking could take. A year later, I still have a few boxes that have not been opened. What's that rule, "If you go to move it a second time and it still isn't unpacked from the last move, then it's time to get rid of it?"

Thankfully, Nokian approached me about reviewing a set of Light Truck tires. I thought it was a great idea. Then I realized it would require one thing I did not have easy access to: a Light Truck or SUV. After a bit of scrounging, cajoling, and begging, I finally was able to talk a friend into letting me try a new set of snow tires on his wife's Mercury Villager and agree to let me drive it in the snow. [Okay, seeing how he is a bit of a repressed sports car fanatic, it wasn't too hard to convince him to let me to flog the Villager through the snow.]

Once again, the weather was to be a problem. Almost every time we tried to get together, the snow left before we could. Finally, I did get a chance to take a very short test drive and I was as impressed as he was, but that's really getting ahead of ourselves. First, let's take a look back and see how the tires we reviewed last year did this year.

Looking Back

Very few people can afford to buy a new set of snow tires every year, so an important part of the Real World Snow Tire Tests is the continued evaluation of the tires we have tested in the past. This past winter, we continued to run two of our previous contenders: the Nokian NRW and the Vredestein SnowTrac.

The Nokian NRW is holding up well. I continue to run it on my daily driver and it still performs quite well. Based on the tread wear, I will probably get another one or two seasons out of it. Since I drive my cars quite hard, even in the winter, this is, for me, quite good.

The Vredestein SnowTrac is also doing quite well. It still edges out the NRW in terms of snow traction. It is not quite as precise on the dry, handling more classically like one expects from a snow tire. This tire also looks like it will last a couple of more seasons.

The Dunlop Graspic DS-1 sat out last winter. Look for it to return in future tests.

The original review of the Nokian NRW, Vredestein SnowTrac, and the Dunlop Graspic DS-1 can be found at The Snow Tire FAQ website, <http://www.snowtire.info>.

The Tire

This year, we continued to look at two of the tires from the 2001 Real World Snow Tire Test, and added a new type of tire to our tests, a Light Truck/SUV tire, Nokian's WR.

We actually tested the 235/75 R 15 size of this tire on a Mercury Villager. Although this is a slightly oversize fitment of the tire, we have not experienced any clearance or rubbing problems. The speedometer error is a bit high (about 9 mph at 60 mph), but if you are aware of it, you can make adjustments. The increased visibility due to the extra height was welcomed by the primary driver of the Villager.



What We Say

In a word, WOW. Not only did the Nokian WR out perform the Villager's former all-season tires in the snow, it out performed them on the dry. The Villager's primary driver, my friend's wife, immediately took a liking to them. Her first comment was that they felt better than the tires that had been on the Villager. They were not as spongy and had a better feeling of control. Something worth noting because she had yet to drive them on the snow.

In the snow, they were incredible. My friend was the first one to drive them in anything looking like snow. The snow was more like fine grains of ice than snow, and conditions were definitely slick. As he ventured out, he phoned me with his report: [He uses a hand's free phone in the car. We don't feel it is safe to have one hand on the wheel and the other on a cell phone.]

I had to do some errands today, and since it snowed, I took [my wife's] van. Wow. It hardly feels like there is any snow at all.... Hang on, I got to turn onto [the main road].... It pulled out without a problem. There was a school bus behind me, and he is still spinning his rear wheels trying to pull up that little hill onto the main road. He's going the other way and no one is coming, let's test the steering.... Wow. It just followed how I turned. No sign of slipping. Now the brake test, oops, just a little bit of slipping, but nothing like the other tires.... These are great!

Since Nokian markets this tire as an All-Weather Plus tire, we decided to run the tire all year round and see how well it does. I had a chance to drive the WR on a 90 degree (Fahrenheit) day in summer and walked away impressed. While it does not handle like the slicks on my race car, or even the summer performance tires on my daily driver, it handles quite respectably.

Another area of concern with any tire is tread wear. Many snow tires wear very poorly in summer weather. This is due to the fact that the rubber compounds used are designed for cold temperatures. This often means that the rubber gets quite soft and wears quickly in hot weather. The Nokian WR, which is designed as an All-Weather tire, does not suffer from this problem. The tires have been on the vehicle for just over 10 months, and show normal tire wear.

At this time, if I was looking to outfit a Light Truck, Mini-Van, or SUV with one tire for use throughout the year, I would definitely get a set of Nokian WR tires.

More About The Test

I have read many tire tests in the past, with the vast majority of them focusing on quantitative measurements done under well controlled conditions. These test leave only a modicum of room for qualitative evaluations. There is a place for quantitative tests, but I wanted to do something more representative of the experiences the people who were asking me questions would encounter. Consider this, how many times do you really drive on bare, perfectly flat "hockey rink" ice? How about 3 inches of virgin snow in a parking lot? This test would focus on real drivers driving on real roads under real conditions.

From this desire grew two guiding principles for the test:

1. Make the test a real world test. The conditions the tires are tested in should be the same conditions people can expect to find in their real lives. Since the real world doesn't end after one weekend, the tires should be tested with some real mileage. To that end, the tests are only really finished when the tire is disposed of, but for the sake of readers, the results would be published in a timely manner. This also implies that we will continue to evaluate the tires and have periodic updates as the tires wear.

2. Make the tests fair by making sure everything is as equal as possible. Testing should be done with nearly identical cars which were driven in nearly identical conditions, with nearly identical driving styles. Tires choices should also match. If one tire is studded, they should all be. Likewise, the same size tire should be used on all vehicles.

Rochester, New York formed the center of our test. Rochester is on Lake Ontario, half-way between Buffalo and Syracuse. Every year we get at least one major snow fall that drops up to 10 inches before it is over, and one or two days where the temperature is just right to give everything a slight coating of freezing rain. From November through April (and sometimes May), we get varied climate that can bring almost every type of winter precipitation you can think of. With all of this weather, the tires we tested were exposed to everything from heavy snow to ice to dry roads to slush to rain, sometimes all in the same trip!

Recommended by the Snow Tire FAQ



This year marks the introduction of the new Snow Tire FAQ Logo. Along with the logo, we are also introducing our “Recommended” mark. The logo at the left indicates that a tire has been tested in one of our Real World Snow Tires Tests and has proven itself as a tire we can recommend. The recommendation is based on a qualitative analysis of the tire. When you are looking for snow tires, look for the “Recommended by the Snow Tire FAQ” logo.

Summary Of Results

The following table summarizes the results of our tire tests. For tires tested in previous years, the Traction results shown are from the first year the tire was tested.

We have added two new columns to the table, along with a friendly icon to let you know which tires we are willing to recommend to our friends and family.

The “Degradation of Snow/Ice Performance” is a measure of how well the tire continues to perform over time and is from the current year. A rating of Excellent under the Degradation column indicates that the performs did not significantly degrade, a rating of Okay indicates that there was significant degradation of performance, a rating of Unacceptable indicates the amount of performance degradation was so significant such as to make it unacceptable for use for more than one season.

This year we also add the “Overall” rating. This measure is biased toward Snow and Ice performance. This rating may change as time passes and the degradation of snow and ice performance is considered.

	<i>Snow Traction</i>	<i>Ice Traction</i>	<i>Wet Traction</i>	<i>Dry Traction</i>	<i>Degradation of Snow/Ice Performance</i>	<i>Overall</i>
Nokian WR Light Truck Tire 	Excellent	Good	Good	Good	N/A	Excellent
<i>Previously Reviewed Tires – Winter 2001</i>						
Nokian NRW 	Excellent	Good	Excellent	Good	Excellent	Excellent
Dunlop Graspic DS-1 	Good	Good	Excellent	Okay	N/A	Good
Vredestein SnowTrac 	Excellent	Good	Excellent	Okay	Excellent	Excellent

Future Plans

We had planned to do a head-to-head tire test shoot-out, but the weather prevented it from happening. With any luck, the weather will cooperate and we can do it this year.

We also hope to test some new snow tires this winter. There are a few new brands that look interesting. We are currently in the process of negotiating tires to test.

Snow Tires Needed!

The Snow Tire FAQ would love to test other brands of tires, but since I do this as a hobby, not a vocation, it all comes down to what is donated. If you would like to donate a set of snow tires, please contact us at flybrick@frontiernet.net.

Show Your Support

The Snow Tire FAQ has a new logo, and we have made static cling window stickers of it. If you have found this review or The Snow Tire FAQ itself useful, please consider showing your support by putting one of these logos in the window of your car.

If you have an ink jet printer, you can print your own copy of the logo from the high resolution file located on The Snow Tire FAQ web page (<http://www.snowtire.info>). Clear, static cling “paper” for ink jet printers is available from most office supply stores. Be forewarned, this stuff is not cheap, but it does have some great uses. Alternatively, you may want to print it on magnetic sheets, which are even more expensive, but offer the ability to be put on any metal



surface of your car. [Okay, I hear the snickers from you people with fiberglass and aluminum bodied cars.]

I am also investigating having some static cling window stickers made up. The projected cost for the US is \$5 each, which should cover printing and shipping.

Please Note: The window sticker uses the logo above and does not have the gradient sky from the one at the beginning of this review.

Thanks to...

- Nokian for seeing the value of having tires reviews by The Snow Tire FAQ and providing tires to be tested.
- The Riling clan for the use of the family van as a test mule.
- My wife and family who put up with all of the time I put into this.