

## THE OFF DUTY SKI ISSUE | GEAR &amp; GADGETS



GETTY IMAGES

...AS THE DRIVEN SNOW  
About four in 10 cars globally (57% in China) are some shade of white.

RUMBLE SEAT / DAN NEIL



## Why 'Winter White' Is the Only Car Color You Want

**MEET CON HATHY.** Mr. Hathy is, or was, a teenager broadcasting from his tidy bedroom in Boulder, Colo. He's so nice.

In honor of our Off Duty Ski Issue, I was researching the phrase "winter white" when I found Mr. Hathy's 2017 YouTube video "The Tragedy of White Cars," in which he explains his provocative theory of whiteness. White, he says, is a cool color for a car and he likes it very much! But if four in 10 cars are white—38% world-wide in 2019, according to Axalta Coating Systems—the sheer number "dampens the coolness of it."

Exactly. In the course of his 6:22-minute video, Mr. Hathy shares most everything I could tell you about why white is the most popular automotive color, globally and nationally. Except he shares it into a camera about a foot from his face, with a beautiful quilted bedspread behind him. Somebody loves her grandson.

As Mr. Hathy observes, white factors positively into vehicles' residual value. The color is widely neutral, like beige paint in model homes. Used white cars and trucks are therefore easier to sell. Mr. Hathy's sagacious commenters chime in, noting a number of functional ad-

vantages, including better visibility, which results in lower accident rates compared with dark cars, which in turn results in lower insurance costs. That's right: white privilege.

Motor vehicle fleet managers often choose white over some distinctive color related to their function, Mr. Hathy notes, in order for the vehicles to have wider appeal in the secondhand market. White is easier to paint over, whereas you can always spot a retired U.S. Forest Service pickup by its distinctive pastel green. As an aside, I expect to see in the next few years thousands of perigrinating retirees roaming the

roads in dark-gray Sprinter vans, mustered out of Amazon's fleet and converted into RVs.

On his YouTube bio, Mr. Hathy lists himself as studying aerospace engineering at the University of Colorado Boulder. Not video production. His younger self admits he didn't really prepare anything for his video and promises to think of a better topic. But thanks to the internet, these fizzling half-thoughts about white cars will live forever and his grandchildren will one day laugh at him for being a big goof in college. I am glad to help.

There are forces at work here be-

yond Mr. Hathy's ken. In China, the world's biggest auto market, 57% of all vehicles sold in 2019 were white, according to Axalta's Global Automotive 2019 Color Popularity Report—white being socially codified with notions of national progress and visions of antiseptic modernity.

The U.S. went similarly wild about white in the late 19th and early 20th century, the era of sani-

**White does have some advantages in snowy climates, especially for lazy people—it hides salt better than darker colors.**

tary food preparation. Even as late as 1963, my sister had to wear a nurse's uniform—white from cap to crepe-soled shoes—to wait tables at a fish-fry restaurant.

Of course white paints are not all created equal. There is fleet white, the easily repairable, appliance-like white of chicken inspectors and truant officers. There's affluent white, sparkling with mica flakes like rented Aspen powder. There is ultra-high-net-worth white, the squinting arclight of wedding limousines and prized stallions, the white of trophy societies. Please sir, do not touch the Emir's Bentley Mulsanne.

But as for a consensus shade of winter white for cars, there really isn't one. Pantone lists one among its 18 shades of white, but it's more of a sand, if you ask me, which Pantone didn't. A winter white would seem to want to be dazzling, to have a lot of blue reflected from the sky. Lexus makes a white-metallic that glows like a freshly detailed Imperial storm trooper.

White does have some advantages in snowy climates. It hides salt better than darker colors, for example. Camouflage, if you are hunting deer from your car. There is an ongoing debate about which color can go the longest between washings in the winter: silver, gray, or white? But if you own a black car in Michigan you might as well park it for six months out of 12.

For all the euphony and alliteration of the phrase, winter white is more of a squirrel-meat gray.

## Eyes, Eyes Baby

To navigate that awesome scenery, you need optics that turn a snowy white sea into a discernible line. These innovative pairs do the trick



E. MARTIN RAMINI/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

**1. Oakley Prizm Persimmon Lens**  
Most serious skiers and snowboarders need two pairs of lenses: one for battling the glare of bright bluebird days, another for seeing clearly when it's overcast or particularly powdery. Oakley's orange-y Persimmon lens works for both. To create it, the brand developed a proprietary lens dye that allows just 37% of light in—enough to highlight the contrast of bumps and lines in flat, low-light conditions, while still pro-

tecting eyes when the sun marches out from behind the clouds. The utilitarian color functions "no matter what's going on out there," said Larry Hartenstein, general manager at Jackson Hole Sports in Wyoming and a ski obsessive who has hit the slopes at more than 180 resorts world-wide. (\$160, oakley.com)

**2. Smith Optics 4D MAG Goggles**  
Smith extended the below-the-eyes curves of its latest lens shape to in-

crease your vertical field of view by up to 25%—no need to bend your neck to see your skis. This deepened perspective helps you carve down the mountain more efficiently, explained Mr. Hartenstein. Caveat: A slight fishbowl effect distorts your vision when your eyes wander toward the edges of the goggles. You'll get used to it, but try to keep your eyes trained forward the first time you're braving a high-altitude summit. On the bright side, by elim-

inating the distraction of a bulky frame in your periphery, Smith's unique design helps you focus on your line. (\$280, smithoptics.com)

**3. Zeal Optics Beacon Goggles**  
Inspired by a bird's-eye view of the mountains, Zeal Optics created its Beacon Goggle using what it calls Observation Deck Technology—the frame sits further away from your forehead but presses closer to your cheeks to pitch the lens forward at

a 10-degree angle. This slight change significantly expands your peripheral vision while cutting down the number of distracting reflections that bounce back at you. "By reducing the glare off of the snow, you're going to increase the amount of definition you can see," said Mr. Hartenstein. Now if only they could do something about this goggle-shaped sunburn. (Available in Sept. 2020, from \$129, zealoptics.com) —Ashley Mateo

## Which Ski Bike Is Right For You?

Two curious new ways for winter daredevils to shred through powder

### If You Already Own a Mountain Bike

The Fat Bike Skis attachment is compatible with most mountain bikes, replacing the front wheel. It even comes with an axle adapter for your particular fork. Once locked in via a simple four-step online guide, it operates like any two-wheeler, letting you comfortably and nimbly pedal through 18 inches of downhill powder, or traverse 6-8 inches of light snow on flat tracks. When you're done, quickly swap your wheel back on and ride into town.



Fat Bike Skis attachment, \$875, fatbikeskis.com

### If You're Rich and Slightly Crazy

More ski trike than bike, the Sno-Go's three-plank design gives you a unique sense of stability and control as you head downhill. At only 33 pounds, it's light enough to carry on a lift, or let you carve through trees or soar conspicuously off a jump. The \$1,449 price is steep compared to the cost of adapting a mountain bike (see left). But you'll work your quads and burn more calories standing and swaying on the Sno-Go, toning your body for the coming beach season.



Sno-Go Ski Bike, \$1,449, sno-go.us

ARTHUR MOUNT