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Moscow Winter Driving; It's Snow Joke

By Clare Taylor

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If you live in Moscow, it won't have escaped your notice that we've had a lot of snow recently. Actual amounts are hotly debated; the BBC (based in the UK, so what do they know?) reported 63 centimeters. A Russian friend of mine pooh-poohed that and insisted that last weekend's fall totaled only 2c. I suspect that the true figure lies somewhat closer to the Beeb's number, but doubt that it was the record-breaking amount they were trumpeting. Whatever it was, it was enough to make the UK-based website's pages (perhaps they were having a light news week), so in this post I will default to the technical term and refer to it as "a LOT" of snow.

The strange thing is, however, while I noticed on Monday that it was a bit painful on the roads, and certainly more slippery than usual to get up the hill out of our little corner of snowy paradise, I would not for a moment have thought the previous few days had seen a remarkable fall for Moscow in the winter.

Could it be that after 3 years here I have ... assimilated?

Admittedly, on my drive to the nearest metro station at the beginning of the week, I did think

that there was a lot of snow still on the road considering we were in the middle of the morning rush-hour, which is normally the time when the snow ploughs would have ensured that if at all possible, the highways were clear. And yes, when I reached the station and had to park more or less in a snow drift, I did wonder just what was going on. And of course, when I couldn't find a spot in the school car park when I went to collect my children in the afternoon, I did think it was really quite busy, and how inconvenient it was that so many parking spots were unavailable because they were filled with 4 meter-high piles of snow that the street cleaners had put there in desperation because the usual snow clearing trucks unaccountably hadn't turned up.

And finally, it did cross my mind, once the boys and I had climbed back into the car, that perhaps it might have been simpler to walk as the chances we might get stranded there — if the car got bogged down as I executed a three-point turn on an uncleared single lane track — were higher than I was comfortable with.

But I never for a moment really doubted my ability to get the car turned around in piles of 2-foot-high snow, saying to my sons as I completed the maneuver successfully; "I am a GODDESS!"

Unsurprisingly, my sons did not concur, pointing out that a) goddesses don't drive cars and b) if they did, they could just magic themselves out of tricky snow/car-related situations and c) I wasn't wearing a toga*.

But anyway. Sixty-three centimeters — sorry, a LOT — of snow in one weekend. And I drove through it, successfully. Yes, I AM patting myself on the back; I think I deserve to after spending the first 25 years of my driving life in a country where the snow usually falls only once or twice each winter and may only hang around for a day or so when it does arrive. You're welcome to drive on over and disagree with my awarding myself plaudits if you want, of course. Pack a thermos flask of tea and a couple of blankets** though — it's started snowing again, and those roads look a bit tricky...

** Although I'm sure I could really rock the toga look, a sheet and snow boots never seemed to me to be the obvious sartorial choice for the school run on a minus 12 degree Celsius day. Or, indeed, on any day.*

*** Yes of course I had hot drinks and blankets with me in the car. I am always that prepared. (Cough).*

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