

Coping with the Cold Street Survival

February 2009

Pre-ride planning can help you be ready for any change in the weather. I spend a lot of time browsing the [Weather Channel](#) before a long ride because its coverage is broader than the local So. Utah stations. It pays to remember that changes in altitude will change temperatures as well. Although the standard rate of temperature drop is about four degrees for every 1000 feet you climb, I know of one 4500-foot climb from desert to mountains where the drop can be as much as 40 degrees Fahrenheit. It can also be sunny at the bottom and snowing 15 miles up the road. I think most of us have experienced this living in the beautiful area we live in.



Snow and Ice

If you get caught in a snowstorm, don't panic. Riding on snow just requires you to slow down, be very smooth, and allow plenty of distance to stop. Make ultra gentle inputs with brakes, clutch, steering and throttle. Make sure no one is following too closely. Falling down at low speed on a slick surface probably won't hurt you, but if the car behind you can't stop or doesn't know how, the outcome could be hazardous to your health. Also, don't expect drivers to recognize how precarious things are. Falling snow will make it harder for you to see and vehicles will cut you off, turn in front of you, and stop without warning. Unless it's a light snow, brief snow or you are close to home, head for the closest motel or eatery, or the quickest way out of the storm. You might want to go back down the mountain for example.

The other hazard of cold weather is ice. Watch out for those concrete bridges that freeze before the asphalt roads do, and be alert for black ice in shady areas. Several riders that I know have had to lay their bikes down from loss of traction on unseen ices in Southern Utah's canyons on winter days. If you must cross an icy patch, or even a suspected one, keep the bike slow, straight and steady, and minimize the inputs as mentioned above. Squeezing in the clutch and free-wheeling across the ice will keep you from applying either too much or too little power to the rear wheel. As a rule, you will be steadier with your feet on the pegs or floorboards rather than dragging them. Also watch for sand placed in corners to deal with the ice.

One very important thing to remember about ice is it does not have to rain or snow to be present. Asphalt roads are course in material. Moisture from under the asphalt, in the sub-grade, will seep upward through the asphalt making its way to the pavement surface. If the temperature falls below 32 degrees, ice will form. Every rider must be aware of this in cold climates.

Every rider should know his or her comfort zone. If you feel uncomfortable about the weather, the conditions, or any other road hazard, turn around and go back the way you came from or find a place to hang out until conditions get better.



For some riders, winter simply marks the end of daylight savings time. For many motorcyclists, it signals something far more important, the end of the riding season. Just because the days are short and the air is cold, it doesn't mean you have to stash the ol' scooter. With a little knowledge and the right combination of gear, you can feasibly ride year-round in or around Southern Utah.

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When it's cold, your primary goals should be to keep your body warm and to avoid hypothermia (which often means keeping a lid on perspiration, too). Hypothermia is a condition brought on by the body's temperature dropping lower than it needs to function normally. The initial symptoms include shivering, which can occur with as little as a 1.5-degree (Fahrenheit) decrease in body temperature. At this point, just stepping inside from the cold and getting something warm down your belly usually is all it takes to recover.

But if your clothing gets damp (from either perspiration or the elements), it's a good idea to change into dry clothing or gear. Don't take wind chill for granted, either. As air moves past your body it causes greater loss of heat than would occur with no air movement. In other words, wind makes conditions feel colder than they are (most of the chilling effect occurs by 30 mph).

Fortunately, the right gear can mitigate potential riding misery. For protection from the cold, the wind and the rain, consider the following:

Helmet: A "lid" offers insulation as well as crash and wind protection. If it's downright frigid outside, add a head rap made of thin, insulating material on the head and thicker insulation around the neck.

Base Layer: This is the layer of clothing closest to your skin that keeps you comfortable (and, ideally, wicks away moisture). There is a variety of fabrics to choose from-wool blends, silk, silk blends and various nylon and polypropylene materials-but there's only one rule: no cotton. Cotton can be wonderful in the summer, but in the winter, it retains moisture and dries slowly.

Mid-layer: This layer provides the bulk of the warmth, retaining body heat and letting perspiration escape. It's usually made of man-made fabric, like fleece, which comes in different weights for varied temperature ranges. Some of these garments even have their own windproof and/or waterproof/breathable membranes, making them suitable for wearing off the bike.

Outer Layer: This is where your jacket and pants come in. Think textile-despite leather's superior abrasion resistance, it's usually neither windproof nor waterproof, and thus not ideal for winter wear (unless, of course, it has a built-in windproof and waterproof barrier).

Gloves: Again, windproof and waterproof/breathable barriers are your friends, and a little insulation goes a long way, too. Extra glove liners will come in handy if it's really cold.

Boots: As with the gloves, jackets and pants, an included windproof and waterproof barrier is essential for riding comfort. And don't forget the synthetic socks! You can choose from a variety of motorcyclist-specific designs these days, and ski and snowboard socks work well, too. Additional liners can help keep things cozy and dry.

With the right wardrobe and a smart approach, it shouldn't be too difficult to get out of the garage and onto a back road for a comfortable winter ride. If the temperature starts to warm up, you can always stop and peel off a layer; if you're really cold-blooded, there's hope, in the form of electrically heated riding gear.

If you have the proper gear and avoid the slick spots, riding in cold weather can be as comfortable and fun as riding on warm days. Just keep in mind, "SAFETY" is always number one when it comes to riding in any conditions.

