

From Pete DOHERTY

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OK, we will assume that you are reading this article because you are an advanced motorcyclist or are training to be an advanced motorcyclist. Therefore the first two things will be assumed as a given.

Only undertake your journey in the poor weather conditions that we are currently experiencing if absolutely necessary.

POWDERS - as you are all familiar with this essential pre riding requisite I shall not expand, HOWEVER, never underestimate the importance of your tyre pressures. They are absolutely critical to the safety and performance of your tyre. It's easy to check the rest of POWDERS but tyre pressures are often overlooked as it's a fiddly and messy job. I sometimes ask on test the tyre pressures of the machine, only to be given a blank look and then told they look it up in the hand book. If checked regularly then you should know these off the top of your head.

Let's assume you do need to commute or use your bike for work and it's the only form of transport available to you, what's the best way to keep the elements at bay?

Not everyone can afford the latest Gore-Tex gear, although the prices have come down over the years and have become more affordable. Riding everyday throughout the winter period I have tried everything out there and after 29 years I have realised that you do not have to spend a fortune on kit to keep you warm and dry.

Heated grips - for wimps apparently. In that case, consider me the biggest wimp on earth. I have owned over 27 bikes over the years and since I have been converted to the merits of heated grips my last 9 bikes have had them fitted (even useful in the early hours of a summer morning on the way to work). These are inexpensive and easy to fit even for the novice rider/DIY bod. Whether it's cold or just wet, switch these on and feel a smile come back on your face and warmth back in your hands. They don't heat the tops of your hands but do make a huge difference. Also a must fit for me, at least during winter are hand guards. These again are inexpensive and stop the cold wind hitting your hands directly. Handlebar muffs are also available. There are numerous heated garments on the market but these come in at a higher price bracket and are down to the individual's budget.

Thermal clothing - again, most major bike brands sell thermal tops and trousers and are an absolutely fantastic base layer. Having used these brand names for years I have recently moved over to thermal underwear from my local supermarket at a fraction of the cost, in fact, I bought three sets of tops & bottoms for the price of one set from a leading motorcycle manufacturer and they are equally as good.

Clothing in general - build up thin layers as they trap the warm air in between as opposed to a chunky fleece which restricts movement and does not have the same heat retention.

This week I have done over 900 miles in conditions down to -3 and in snow. My best layer to stop that penetrating, biting wind was a cheap two piece over suit. Two piece is far better than a one piece as it's so much easier to get on and off as opposed to the one piece which requires the help of the loved one to get on and several passersby to get off again. Additionally, should you damage one or the other then it's less cost to replace. Just remember to go up at least one size for ease of fitting and movement. There is nothing worse than not being able to move your arms due to restricted movement caused by tight clothing. This also applies to Hi Viz tops with sleeves where it stretches over elbow pads and restricts movement.

Use a neck tube/buff to seal in the neck area. It's personal preference as to how thick you go, but make sure it is tucked in all round. The same applies to your gloves. Ideally your sleeves should be over your gloves to stop the rain running into them, but some clothing does not allow for this so try and create a good tight fit with the gloves over the cuffs. Again, the over jacket can easily accommodate the gloves with elasticated cuffs.

Socks - again, a thin pair with a thermal pair over the top works for me, rather than one thick pair as it allows for ease of movement and traps the warm air.

Helmets - ensure the visor is clean and free from scratches. The scratches can distort vision in car headlights and also collect all the grime from the road. Wash in warm soapy water and wipe dry. I apply a house hold polish with silicone which allows the rain to run off by moving your head left and right. I also swear by the pinlock system which gives you a sealed double glazing effect and does not mist up. If it does it is normally down to the rubber seal lifting off the visor due to the ingress of dirt. Simply remove the pinlock and wash with warm water and reapply - job done. There are other anti fogging products out there and this could be a discussion point on the forums as to who finds what works the best. I do not wear spectacles so I cannot comment on that side of things, however, regardless of the time of year I do wear either clear, or more often, yellow tinted glasses whilst riding. This keeps the wind out of your eyes and allows you to ride with the visor open if you do happen to have 'fogged up'.

That's pretty much it. There are plenty of other hints & tips out there, but this is a simple and effective way of staying warm and dry. Plan your route around tea stops and don't be tempted to push on that extra mile, because once that cold really sets in, it takes much longer to get your body temperature back up. Once you get cold the concentration drops and we all know what comes next.....

Riding - it's all about observation, anticipation & planning. One of the biggest problems in the icy conditions are stopping distances - normal stopping rules no longer apply (stop in the distance you can see to be clear on your side of the road), half stopping distances no longer apply, can you recall the stopping distance in Road craft? When you apply this stopping distance, don't forget it also applies to everyone else! On the B656 this week - everyone knows the Codicote Road for some reason; the rider in front was travelling at the appropriate pace for the conditions and encountered a junction left sign. Rear observation was duly carried out and position from the junction was appropriate. Guess what happened next. Stopping rules apply to others, however they don't know what they are as not everyone is an advanced rider/driver. The Vauxhall Corsa locked up on the ice in the side road and slid out into the path of the oncoming bike which luckily just missed it.

Have a look at the photo of the 2000 mile 10 plate BMW - it was going along a straight piece of road in a two way NSL. Information: Bend right, Position: It moved to the near side, Speed: speed achieved nicely on deceleration, Gear: appropriate gear for the speed taken, Acceleration: gentle acceleration applied with due regard to the wet surface. What

happened next? Mud all over the road on the exit which could not be seen until mid way around the corner. Unfortunately, having lost speed the bike slid sideways at about a low walking pace and slipped onto the grass verge where the BMW decided to go back to it's roots and spat the rider off and went ploughing the field. Rider OK, bike reasonably OK and two beautiful furrows ploughed, but just a reminder of the filthy conditions out there during this time of year.

I hope this has been of some use, ride safe and keep on learning.

Regards

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