



Keeping Warm

There is always a wind chill factor when riding a motorcycle. In the summer it usually feels good. But when it is cold out, it can chill you to the bone. Hypothermia can set in and you will be unable to react quick enough to hazardous situations. Plan ahead as much as possible. Plan your mileage and destination. Stop more frequently. Get some warm coffee or soup during your stops. Don't let your body get cold to the core. Your extremities will start to go first. Your hands and feet will not operate the brakes, clutch and gearshift lever properly. You may not be able to feel them. Hypothermia can be a nasty thing. Once you get that cold, the only thing that will warm you up is a hot shower or bath.

Luckily there are a lot of great fabrics and equipment available for staying warm. What you want to do is eliminate the wind. Be sure the items you buy are made out of a fabric that does that. Leather, gortex and polar fleece are all windproof. Thermals are useless without the windbreaker on the outside. Wear enough layers. Always carry extra layers in case it gets colder. Be sure you have some extra room to pack away your heavy clothes if it warms up during the ride. Leather chaps are an excellent investment. I like polar fleece when I am layering my clothing. It's light enough to pack and really warm. You can find large selections of polar fleece in camp stores and catalogs. They make jackets, pants, socks, and hats in polar fleece. In a pinch you can put on your rainsuit, it will break the wind and keep some of the heat inside. And if you are caught without anything, buy a newspaper and stuff it down you sleeves and pants. It's better than freezing to death. There are glove liners, gloves with Thinsulate, and electric gloves available. You can also get electric socks and heavy winter boots with liners. If you are wearing liners or extra socks be sure to get boots a little larger than usual. Full face helmets are warmer then open faced helmets. Polar fleece hats or a balacalava helps too. Don't forget your neck, wear a scarf or one of those warm neck triangles. Anywhere that air can get in needs to be plugged up. Electric vest, jackets, pants and gloves are the way to go when you are going to do any serious riding in the winter. They hook to your battery and really provide you with heat. Check them all out before buying. Some come with a lifetime guarantee on the electrical components. Some are washable. If you buy one that uses fuses, be sure to keep some extra fuses in a spot you can get to easily.

Your tires have less traction when they are cold and they are cold for the first several miles that you ride. Always check your air pressure and tread -- good tires are a must. Make sure you have a good battery, too. If you wear contacts, they do freeze and are very hard to wear in cold. Wear your glasses on those days.

When it starts to snow and you're still out there, there are a few other things to watch out for. Watch out for the other road users. Many of them are inexperienced on slippery surfaces. Bridges do freeze first and stay frozen longer. They will be slick. If the other road users are sliding around on the bridges that is definitely going to effect you. You may say now that you won't be riding in the cold, but you never know. The first time I rode in the cold was to a friend's funeral. He died in the middle of the winter and he wanted a biker's funeral. I almost froze to death myself because I didn't have the right gear. But over the years I've added to my collection of winter riding gear and try to get the bike out for a ride whenever there is no snow or ice on the road. Maybe I'll see you out there!