

## **WHY BIKE OUTSIDE IN THE WINTER?**

Ref: Steve Brawley's the risk of hypothermia when cycling dated 5 Feb 26

A perspective...based on my experience not only as a bit of cyclist, but as a mountaineer, Nordic skier, white water canoeist and general outdoor enthusiast.

Please take into consideration that, physically, physiologically and emotionally we are all very different, this is a generalisation, it's what works well for me, but hopefully I'm offering up some food for thought!

Not all of us will encounter dire winter biking conditions, but the idea of adapting to winter weather and being able to handle adversity with a positive attitude is something that can transfer to any unexpected conditions, and to life in general.

The funny thing is, sometimes the worst conditions end up having more bark than bite anyway. If you can get yourself out the door in appropriate gear and get past the initial "ugh!" moment, you might just find it to be oddly serene or excitingly adventurous. Often when riding in the rain and cold taking a moment to reflect, I realize in fact that I'm reasonably comfortable.

Rather than wishing the weather was a bit different, why not embrace the elements and see it as a bit of a challenge.

Also, riding with friends in adverse conditions can form strong bonds through a memorable experience together...in posterity something to chat over when having a beer or two!

**However, there is one caveat to all of this. I would strongly advise against going on a road bike ride in icy, snow or extremely windy, gale force conditions!**

### **Hypothermia (Cold/Wet, UK)- I have never experienced it**

The worst weather for developing hypothermia is **wet, windy, and cool**, rather than just extremely cold. While freezing temperatures are dangerous, a combination of 30°F to 50°F (-1°C to 10°C) with rain and high wind often causes faster heat loss than dry, sub-zero weather because wet clothing loses all insulating properties [Treatment of Hypothermia - YouTube](#)



**Cold Dry (Norway/Arctic) I've had mild frost bite!** The Hardangervidda plateau, Norway 2020, the temperature dropped to around -35 degrees C. Certainly it was bitterly cold, but I was comfortable, mainly because that morning I had eaten well, Nordic skiing is hard work so was able to generate enough energy to stay warm, but above all I was dry, so was able to retain body heat in between several layers of clothing on my body. Highly unlikely that you would experience this sort of cold weather injury cycling in the Cotswolds or most parts of the UK!

## **5 Things to consider when cycling in cold weather**

Since I don't own a trainer, and train all year-round, I have gathered a few tricks for staying warm in winter weather, as I expect most of you have. Here are 5 things to look at.

### **1. Pre-ride routine**

Eat and drink something hot before you go out on your ride and make sure you are as warm as possible before heading out. Warming from the inside is preferable to warming from the outside. Avoid getting sweaty before you go out where you may get chilled when your sweat hits the cold air. Foodwise, carbohydrates are best, porridge, oatmeal, hot coffee or cocoa, or soup will not only warm you from the inside, but also pre-hydrate you.

The weather forecast can often be misleading, you look outside and it bears no correlation to what is actually happening. May I suggest, before you get changed into your cycling attire that you go outdoors and physically check the temperature, this could be done by preparing your bike outside, should only take a minute or two, you can then get a feeling as to what and the amount of layers that you should be putting on.

### **2. Hydration and nutrition**

Staying hydrated and fuelled are two very important and often overlooked methods for staying warm. When it's cold, we are less likely to crave water while riding and it is certainly more difficult to extract a bar and unwrap it when you've got thick gloves on, or your fingers are cold, but both dehydration and lack of calories can lead to getting chilled. You'll be surprised, keeping your hydration and your glycogen topped up will make a huge difference. You may not feel thirsty, but it is important that you drink regularly.

### **3. Clothing – Better to have more on than less. You can always shed clothing if too hot, but you can't put it on if you haven't got it!**

Your hands, feet and your face/neck are the three places that conduct heat in or out of your body most quickly. Keeping those areas warm are essential to maintaining your body temperature.

Can I also add, when we stop for a mid-morning break or lunch, especially during the winter months, that really, we should consider staying inside to maintain body heat. If we decided to sit outside, then think about putting more clothes on and don't take anything off.

Think about the layered system and your body metabolism. If you are slim, consider putting on more layers. The advantages, warm air is trapped between each item of clothing. Also consider garment material, for example, you don't want a cotton base layer next to your skin, once wet and damp from sweat or seeping rainwater it never dries out, certainly whilst you are wearing it... this will make you very cold!

## **Hands:**

Mitten Gloves (fingerless) these are a lifesaver on extremely cold days. I have used them, but they are quite bulky and changing gears is not easy. What I have used when it's below freezing are crab grab three fingered gloves, but not sure how waterproof they are!

On very wet chilly days I use thinsulate lined leather ski gloves. This material is generally waterproof, but regularly they need to be treated with a premium beeswax to accentuate their water repellent qualities.

Latex gloves, I've not used these, but other club members have. But have been informed that wearing a pair of thin latex gloves under your cycling gloves can keep your hands incredibly warm due to the wind blocking, heat-trapping properties of the latex. Note, this is only for shorter rides. Anything longer and sweat will build up and start to be counterproductive.

Another option, again I have not used these. Bar mitts: insulated bar mitts attached to your handlebars which will encompass your hands when you grip the bars. These allow you to wear normal, non-bulky gloves that make shifting and braking easier.

## **Feet:**

Winter cycling shoes, there are many brands and types, but do think about size, I normally go for one size or half size bigger. Too tight and it will restrict the blood flow to your toes; it also allows me to put on a thicker pair of socks.

Double lined socks, or two pairs of is based on the principle of the layered system

Overshoes which are windproof, waterproof and fleece lined can be effective, however in prolonged torrential rainwater will eventually seep in, mainly from the top.

Flat pedals: swapping your clipless pedals for flat pedals so that you can wear actual winter boots is another option when it is really, extremely cold! But I've never tried this.

## **Face/Head:**

A balaclava or winter skull cap combined with neck warmer can keep your face, neck and head very warm.

Think about vaseline/lip balm, if you suffer from chapped lips

Glasses: Good protection from the wind and cold. Not to mention the sun's glare, especially when you get that strobing effect. Maybe think about using different lenses. Also, a peaked cap under your helmet can be very effective.

## **4. Group/individual cycling**

This article is mainly about club rides. There is quite a marked difference cycling on a cold winter's day by yourself than with a club group.

By yourself you can hit the pace as fast as you want to generate body heat. With a club group, as matter of our club decorum, we are obliged to stay with the group, that pace could be quite pedestrian so therefore it can be difficult for some individuals to produce enough energy to keep warm. Mainly on our slower Tuesdays ride we may need to consider putting on one or two more layers or looking at our cycling attire in its entirety. Maybe say 'bon voyage' to a club ride and do your own thing!

## **5. What bike in winter – Its functionality is the important thing**

For safety and comfort, we need to consider what type of bike to use on a winters club cycle ride.

For myself I've got a slightly heavy (titanium) reliable touring bike, which I class as my winter bike

Mud guards (long) front and rear, stops spray going on yourself and other riders

Disc brakes, more efficient and effective in wet conditions

28 inch+ tyres, slightly deflated for better grip

Also advisable to regularly check your bike, especially the tyres, brakes and drive system. After all you don't want a break down and be hanging around by the side of a road on freezing winters day!

### **Additional**

For an all-day winter cycle 7/8 hrs + I suggest that each of us should consider carrying the following

- Water bottle
- Pump
- Spare tubes x 2
- Puncture repair kit
- Spare chain link
- Possibly a spare gear cable
- Zip ties
- Basic bike tools, leavers, multi-tool/small pliers
- I carry a small first aid kit
- Lights front and rear
- High viz bib
- Waterproof top
- Navigational device, wahoo/gamin
- Small saddle bag, to carry any additional clothing that you think you might need, or somewhere where you can store clothing that you want to take off

## **Finally**

There are many of you who are very experienced cyclists, so I don't wish to teach you to suck eggs! These are things that generally work for me and I'm still learning and adjusting. Just to reiterate, you must carry on doing what suits you best but do experiment just to see if you can improve your comfort and well-being on a winters ride.

Getting it right is always difficult, as there are so many variables. But when we do, it can be a carefree ride, giving us time to stand a stare and immerse ourselves in this quite unique and stunning landscape...even in winter.

Thank you Steve, for being the geneses of this topic.

Mens sana in corpore sano

Paul Rothwell

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