

Cold Weather Riding

By Mark Caldwell

Fall has definitely set in and winter is on its way. But our weather here in the Pacific Northwest can be deceiving. There have been several days where I look outside, the sun is shining, there is blue sky, it's warm inside and looks like it is warm outside. And then you step outside and discover it's COLD! Or, worse yet, it is warm and so you decide to go for a leisurely afternoon ride like I did a week ago only to discover that yes, it is relatively warm in the sunshine, but when the sun goes behind a cloud the temperature drops dramatically. Or when the sun starts to go down, it's amazing how fast it gets cold.

So what do you do? Well, now is the time to take advantage of all that storage space you're carrying around. If you don't regularly wear chaps or overpants, you might want to pick some up and keep them in a saddle bag. (Of course, as educator, I'd suggest you wear them all the time, but at least have them on-hand, they will really cut down the wind chill and provide an extra layer of insulation). Carry an extra layer of clothing such as a big long-sleeved shirt that you can pull on over whatever you're wearing and still fit in your coat. Or if you have a removable liner in your coat that you took out for the summer, now is the time to either put it back in or at least put it in the trunk.

Long underwear can be a real blessing when the temperature drops, and they don't take up a lot of room in the saddle bags. Do you have a heavyweight set of gloves? Preferable one that is also waterproof. How about a balaclava? No, that's not a Greek dessert. It's a head and neck covering that provides an extra layer of insulation. Perhaps you just need a neckerchief to keep the wind from going down your coat. Do you carry rain gear? Even if it's not raining, your rain gear can act as wind protection and another layer of insulation.

There are a lot of things you can do to keep yourself warm even if you haven't invested in electric heated clothing. In addition to checking your favorite motorcycle accessories store, also check outdoor and winter sports stores. There has been a lot of progress over the last few years in producing very warm yet very thin and lightweight clothing. Remember, you have storage space on your bike. You don't have to completely bundle up like the Sta-Puff marshmallow man when you leave the house. Pack a couple of layers on the bike and be ready to add on as necessary.

Staying warm is not just a matter of comfort, although that is important. Comfort is a matter of safety. If you're constantly thinking about how cold you are, that means you're not thinking about whether that car is going to turn in front of you. But cold is not just a distraction, it also dulls the senses without our realizing it, and slows your reaction time. And when that big truck comes to a sudden stop in front of you on the freeway, you can't afford to have your reaction slowed for any reason. Ride Warm, Ride Safe!