

Riding in Difficult or Unusual Conditions

Extra precautions and adjustments are helpful when riding in less than ideal conditions. Some suggestions for dealing with the more common situations are outlined below.

Riding in wet weather

There are three main concerns with wet weather: staying dry, being visible, and compensating for water on the road.



Photo: Miles McClelland

A lightweight cycling jacket can help keep you dry in the event of an unexpected shower.

Staying dry. Jackets designed for cycling have a longer back panel that will keep your lower back covered as you're bent forward over the handlebars. They'll also help deflect water thrown upward by your rear wheel if your bike is not equipped with rear fenders. Many manufacturers are now offering water-resistant jackets that "breathe" to let in some air and help to keep you comfortable. Most cycling jackets have better ventilation than typical rain gear. Rain pants and shoe covers can be added to keep your lower body dry.

Avoid long overcoat-style raincoats as they drop too low and can become entangled in spokes or brakes. They also lack the ventilation needed to keep you dry.

Hooded coats are not recommended because movement and visibility can be restricted when you turn your head. A helmet cover that fits over the top shell of your helmet is a safer solution to keeping your head dry.

Fenders will prevent your tires from splashing water up on you. If you're planning frequent bicycle touring, commuting, or running errands during rainy months, these would be worth the investment.

Limited vision. Keeping rain out of your eyes and off your glasses will help you see better. Some helmets have built-in sun visors, which are somewhat helpful in rain, but often don't extend out far enough to do the job. A lightweight golf- or baseball-type cap underneath a helmet is more effective. The longer bill works well to keep your eyes and glasses dry, especially in heavy rain.

Make yourself visible. Rainy conditions tend to reduce visibility for both motorists and cyclists. Bright colored clothing is a must. Headlights and tail lights should be used also, especially in early morning or late in the day. Don't assume a motorist sees you. Try to make eye contact with drivers, especially at intersections.

Bike handling and riding technique. Wet weather is likely to reduce your bike's braking ability, especially if your braking system uses brake pads on steel rims. Give yourself some extra time to stop, and "wipe" the rims by letting the pads run over them for at least a full revolution before applying the brakes harder. Aluminum rims, disc brakes or a hub brake system will be more effective in wet conditions.

Be wary of metal objects like construction plates in the road and



Photo: Miles McClelland

Slow down and use extra caution when riding through standing water.

Preventive maintenance for a wet bike

Riding in wet conditions will tend to wash lubricant off of your chain and drive train. At the very least, clean up your chain and apply more lube after riding in the rain. Moisture on the bike in general will tend to lead to corrosion or rust over time, and moisture can corrode bearings in your bottom bracket and your wheels.

Have a qualified bike mechanic check these at least every year, and more frequently if you do a lot of wet weather riding.



Photo: Mark Dodson

Water bottles are essential year-round to stay hydrated.

manhole covers. These will be slick and slippery when wet. Moisture can have the same effect on some pavement striping. Puddles pose challenges too, especially if you cannot tell how deep the water is. They could contain potholes, rocks or debris that you cannot see. If you cannot avoid riding through a puddle, slow down and use extra caution.

Temperature extremes

Hot weather riding. Wear lightweight clothing. The best choices are newer, breathable fabrics that help to wick away moisture and dry quickly. Bike shops and outdoor retailers will have these. These are preferable to cotton, which absorbs moisture and takes more time to dry. Bright colors are preferable as you'll be more visible.

Drink plenty of fluids. It is very important to stay hydrated, especially on warm days, so be sure your bike is set up with a bracket to hold

a water bottle, and make a point to drink frequently. More than one bottle is recommended if you'll be out for several hours or covering a long distance. As an alternative to multiple water bottles, consider a "back pack" style hydration system. These can carry large volumes of liquid and have a hose allowing you to sip hands-free, giving you the advantage of carrying lots of fluid and freeing you from having to lift and replace a bottle while pedaling.

Carry and apply sunscreen. This is especially important on longer rides where you'll be out in the middle of the day or for an extended period of time. Sunscreen is highly recommended even in cloudy or overcast conditions.

Cold weather. Dress in multiple lightweight layers rather than one or two heavy ones. This will give you the flexibility to shed a layer if you feel too warm during the ride. Lycra or polyester based layers underneath will help to wick moisture and keep you from becoming chilled. A combination of outer layers could include a heavy cycling jersey, a jacket, or both. Outerwear that zips up in the front is helpful. You'll heat up when climbing, so opening the zipper can keep you from overheating. Hydration is still important in cool weather, so carry at least one water bottle.

In sub-freezing temperatures, you will really notice the chill around your face and ears. Skullcaps and headbands are available that fit underneath a bicycle helmet. There are shoe covers and arm/knee warmers on the market that can be added to your outer layers. Some riders prefer goggles to protect their eyes.

Dealing with dogs

It is likely that at some point you'll be chased by a dog while riding, especially in rural areas. Most are not dangerous, but you may encounter some who are aggressive. Plan ahead to have some tactics in mind. Riders' personal preferences vary, but here are several options you might consider:

Point and yell "No." A cyclist's pedaling motion sometimes gets dogs excited. Many dogs understand this basic command.

Spray the dog with your water bottle. This may startle the dog and it will back off. But be careful, as you'll be left with only one hand on the handle bar.

Commercially available dog repellents, like *Halt!* can be clipped to your shorts or bike for quick access.

Some dogs may be persistent and too fast to outrun. If you need to stop and dismount, keep your bike between you and the dog.