



About the author



Laura Smith is a full-time motorcycle instructor, certified by the DVSA for the delivery of CBT, Direct Access Scheme and the DVSA Enhanced Riders Scheme. In addition, Laura organises European and UK advanced riding tours. Laura is a partner at RMT Motorcycle Training (RMTNET.co.uk) in the West Midlands, owner of Women Only Motorcycle Training (WOMT.co.uk) and advisor at VideoBiker (VideoBiker.co.uk).

Are you ready for winter?

Laura Smith's top 10 tips for riding during the winter months...



1: Layer up

This may seem like an obvious tip, but even experienced bikers are at risk! The cold winter air, compounded by wind-chill easily leads to rider fatigue, loss of concentration and safety issues. Avoid being caught-out by the cold – invest in thermal base layers and wear another thin layer over the top – perhaps a long-sleeved T-shirt, as well as a fleece. A fleece is thin enough to be worn with multiple layers and is effective at holding in body heat. Avoid hoodies – they can absorb water and quickly steal valuable warmth.

2: Look after your extremities

When a rider can no longer feel their fingers or toes, they will experience increasing issues with braking, gear changes and endurance. Rider fatigue, distraction and discomfort will follow. These are not things to be ignored and under these conditions, it's time to stop, have a warm drink and get the blood flowing back to the extremities. In cold winter

conditions, hypothermia can easily follow and that's not too clever on two wheels! Winter gloves and heated grips are good, but for many all-weather riders, an investment in a good quality pair of heated gloves will pay dividends and make winter riding a great deal safer and more enjoyable.

3: Prioritise bike checks

When you arrive home cold, wet and in darkness – oiling your chain and checking your bike over is easy to overlook. Don't make that mistake and ensure that you regularly check your oil levels, water coolant, brake fluid reservoirs and fuel levels. Also check your air pressure, general tyre condition and tread. The legal tread depth for a motorcycle is 1mm of tread over 75% of the width and over 100% of the circumference. Winter salt is bad news for motorcycles, so swill-off your bike with water after every ride and use a liberal coating of ACF-50 or similar. For a full list of regular bike checks, Google 'POWDDERS'.

4: Allow extra time

For so many reasons, rider risk is escalated during the winter months. The sun is lower and can be blinding. Visibility is often reduced; daylight hours are shorter; the cold causes rider fatigue; road grip is often reduced; stopping distances can increase; other road users can be more distracted; clothing is generally bulkier and more restrictive; visors and glasses can easily steam-up – the list goes on!

In all these things, be a smart rider – increase your journey times, braking and following distances.

5: Snow means NO!

There are no circumstances where it's safe or wise to ride in the snow – it's just not worth the risk. For car drivers, snow equals 10 times the stopping distance; for motorcycles, every application of the brakes can be extremely dangerous. However frustrating, just remember that 'snow means no' and when the white stuff is on the ground, leave your trusty steed in the garage.

6: Invest in waterproofs

Even some of the most expensive textiles can fail to keep you fully dry in heavy rain and wind. That's an issue in the winter as once wet, the cold can quickly set in – leading to a distracted and uncomfortable ride. Carrying an extra set of good quality waterproofs can help, as well as providing an extra layer of warmth (even when it's not raining).

7: Don't chance your vision

A rider's vision is already restricted by the confines of a helmet. In the winter months, visor condensation, misting glasses and eye strain can make matters significantly worse. The wise



Riding in the snow isn't much fun

thing is to stop, to take a break and to address any vision problems. Those who wear glasses should invest in anti-fog spray. All other winter riders should insist on wearing a helmet with a visor Pinlock and as an aside – the winter months are an ideal opportunity for a full optician's eye test. (VideoBiker members get a free eye test at Vision Express – so no excuses!)

8: Don't be too cool for high vis

Fashion is unlikely to make you more visible to other road users. This is especially true during winter conditions of low light and poor visibility. So what if you look like you work for Network Rail? High-viz garments can significantly improve rider safety, plus they offer an extra layer of weather protection. Don't be 'too cool' – wear high-viz garments and be safe.

9: Adapt your riding style

Riding in the winter means adapting not only journey times, but also riding

style. During the winter and in poor weather conditions riders need (among other things) to consider slippery surfaces, making sure our movement around the road isn't sudden or erratic, that the application of our controls is smooth and deliberate and that we don't put ourselves in any unnecessary danger.

10: Increase your skills

The nature of winter riding can be a challenge and generally demands more skill. For those who do need to ride all-year round and in all weathers, the winter is the perfect opportunity to seek further training. Most DVSA certified motorcycle training schools offer bespoke post-test training. Starting with an Enhanced Rider Scheme (ERS) assessment ride is a good idea, especially as the relaunched ERS syllabus includes the opportunity to 'bolt-on' relevant training modules. VideoBiker free membership can also help, as it gives access to motorcycle training audio guides – including basic advanced.

All smiles during advanced skills training day in Snowdonia

