Bad Weather Riding

Winter Riding can be fun and enjoyable. It may be necessary, to commute, or may even be the only option available. It can also be miserable, especially, if ill-prepared, or 'new' to riding.
It can also be a great way to build confidence, learn new skills, become a smoother and more competent rider.

- **Brakes – Grabbing a Handful!**
  Number one mistake, grabbing the brakes – don't do it!
  Squeeze the front brake. Smooth, progressive. Don't 'shock' your front tyre. Introduce it to the idea of gripping the road!
  Squeeze the front brake gently, let it take up the suspension excess and let it settle, and then add more pressure to the brake lever. Use a little more rear brake than you normally would. It will handle some of the workload and balance the bike.
  Learn to modulate your brakes in the wet and you will stop safer, faster and with confidence. It will also give you more confidence in the dry as you will become smoother and more proficient. Brakes are your friend – don't have a fist fight with them, shake their hand gently!

- **Rain – Tyre Pressure**
  Don't drop your tyre pressure in the wet. If you do this 'old bikers' advice it will 'flatten' the tyre profile and may induce aquaplaning. A bike tyre when correctly inflated offers a profile like the bow of a ship, cutting through the water, allowing the tread pattern and sipes to do their job dispersing water and cutting through to the grippy 'tarmac'. Always check your tyre pressures (POWDDERS) and ensure they are set to the bike manufacturers pressure – in any conditions. Consistency is what is required, not some old hack advice. The correct PSI will give the machine stability and correct water evacuation.

- **Fog – High Beam is a No-No**
  Fog basically creates a white wall made of water droplets. Putting high beam on means the bright headlight immediately bounces back off the fog and reduces whatever visibility you had.
  Always use low beam. It cuts under the fog, from your perspective and illuminates below your position. It bounces any light back at a lower level than

you eyeline so doesn't 'blind' you like full beam does.
Slow down, don't take risks. Sound obvious, but fog can come in banks, very suddenly. Distances look different, brake lights get fuzzy and reaction times are changed.
Use a 'pinlock' or some form of anti-fog on your visor.
If in doubt at all, stop and let it clear if you can. Riding in fog is fatiguing and takes enormous concentration. Freezing fog is even more uncomfortable as the road surface may become slippery and you may feel like you are freezing.

- **Cold Weather Tyre Warm Up**
  In chilly weather your tyres take a lot longer to warm up to a working temperature. Let your tyres warm up gradually. Tyres grip through heat and cold rubber is stiff and inflexible. With a cold road surface as well, the recipe exists for a lack of traction, or even a spill.
  Ride carefully for the first 10 or 15 minutes, let the heat build up in the tread and carcass of the tyre. Don't excessively lean, avoid sharp throttle and think about braking distances.

- **Cold Starts – Engine Revving**
  When it is cold, the oil in the bike engine will be thick and sat in the sump.
  If you fire the engine up and immediately rev it to 'get some heat' into it, all that is happening is the engine is running cold metal against cold metal with no real lubrication. This can score pistons, damage rings and overheat the top end.
  Fire the engine on the starter. Let the oil coat the internal surfaces as it circulates on tick over. Let it run for around 30 seconds or so, maybe fire it up and the put helmet and gloves on – that should be sufficient to get the oil circulating.
  Ride gently for the first couple of miles until the oil has had chance to get up to operating temperature.

- **High/Cross winds - Don't fight the wind and the bike!**
  Don't stiffen up and try fighting the wind and the machine. It makes things worst. When you get that sudden blast of crosswind the temptation is to grip hold of the handlebars which makes the machine feel wooden and stiff. Trying to muscle the bike it can't react safely. Counterintuitively relax, grip the 'bars lightly, keep your elbows loose, lean your body into the wind to counterbalance. Let the bike settle itself underneath you. It will shift and move a little, but that is natural. It will create stability – not rigidity. Consider lowering your profile by squatting

down a bit

- **Riding Kit – Wearing Dark Kit**
  When riding in rain, fog or low light conditions make yourself visible and stand out from the crowd. Matte Black is stealth mode.
  Wear kit with reflective piping, Hi-Viz panels, even brightly coloured gloves and helmet. Dress to contrast the background where possible, even if it's just a vest in reduced visibility. Don't be invisible.

- **Riding Kit – Dress for the conditions, dress for the ride**
  Waterproofs are excellent. They keep rain off you. They act as a wind stopper. Do they keep you warm? Think layers. Light materials trap heat and create warmth using your own body heat. A big thick jumper or extra coat under your waterproofs may create some warmth, but will be uncomfortable, bulky and restrictive. Wear a non-cotton base layer. Cotton gets wet and in cold or wet weather never dries, clings and makes you shiver. A walkers top that wicks sweat away is a safer option – yes – safer. Next layer a mid-base. Technical material fleece or preferably a lightweight down jacket. These will trap heat and keep the warmth in. Waterproof on top. But which type? Drop liner or laminated? Both are effective but laminated tend to be stiff and restrictive. They still get wet on the outside but dry more quickly. Drop liners (internal waterproofing sewn into the jacket between the outer shell and liner) are just as waterproof but the outer takes more drying. The advantage of drop liner jackets is the extra layering they provide in the cold. Replace mid layer with a heated jacket which is a game changer in winter! All the above applies to trousers.
  Wear waterproof gloves or those plastic gloves used for refuelling if you don't have them! Again, consider heated gloves in the freezing cold. And always wear sleeves OVER glove cuffs and cinch when putting them on to prevent water and cold air ingress.
  Boots – waterproof are best all year round. Gore-Tex or similar breathe, even in summer. Water will find a way in – neck, waist, cuffs, but correct kit and correct adjustment will prevent as much as possible.
  And remember to wear your E-YARD snood to keep your neck warm!

- **Wet Roads – Riding in the centre of the lane**
  On a wet road, that shiny strip in the centre of your lane is shiny for a reason. Oil and detritus, potentially creating an even more slippery surface. Look for the 'diesel/oil rainbow', particularly on corners or near fuel stations. Lift your visor a

little or at least use your nostrils to smell it!
There is potentially more grip where car or lorry tyres have been, pushing the water and the oils away. Ride in the wheel track of these vehicles where there may be better grip. This gives you more time to plan, space to manoeuvre and maybe even better visibility.

- **Wet Roads – Paint and Metalworks**
  Road paint is very resilient. It is made of a plastic type compound and has very little in the way of grip due to its nature. Water runs off it, so it remains visible and doesn't get covered in road grime. Metalwork, access covers, drain covers etc. have zero grip, which in the rain makes them slippier than an eel.
  They are often placed on junctions and bends for maintenance access, and usually on the best 'line' through that hazard.
  Negotiate then with the machine as upright as possible, don't brake of accelerate when traversing them, brake early if they are on your planned route and unavoidable, or widen your line to avoid them entirely. If you have to stop for any reason, think about foot placement as they will not allow the sole of your boot to grip either.

- **Fogged up visor**
  If your visor starts to fog up in rain think twice before opening if.
  It allows rain into the visor, makes your face feel like it's in the arctic as the rain hits your face and your visibility is reduced with the rain and freezing cold in your eyes. Fit an anti-fog device, Pinlock or similar or treat the internal surface with a proprietary -safe – chemical solution designed for such use. Pinlock is the better option. It creates a 'double glazing' system so cold outside air and warm internal 'breath' air don't cause a condensation effect on the inner of the visor. Pinlock needs to seal, and this is done by adjusting the concentric pins that attach it to the visor. Pinlock also absorbs water and does get dirty and requires careful cleaning and drying occasionally. Keep the packaging it comes in for this reason!
  If you don't have Pinlock fitted and fogging occurs, crack the visor a small amount – but be prepared for water ingress and the arctic effect. Try and direct breath downwards and ensure any venting on the chin or brow is open to create through-flow of air.