DRUID DRIBBLE
Edition 1 Volume 9 – Cold Weather Riding

Some will say, it may be a tad early to talk about cold weather riding, but we are going into September. We also have a number of rides heading outside of the South Texas area in the coming months. Within a month and carrying on into March, the temperature swings from early morning to midafternoon can swing from freezing temps to the 70s. The same swing also hits when travelling in the mid/late afternoon going into the evening hours. One has to acknowledge that, especially in the evenings, you may encounter a significant drop in temps when the sun disappears below the horizon. Consider that you may have produced some "sweat" in the afternoon thus making your undergarments damp. That dampness, especially in cotton-based garments, will not allow that garment to provide decent insulation as the temp drops. Also consider wind chill as while the temps are in the 70's and 80's during the day there are usually little to no issues. However, as the temp drops, it can have a significant impact.

There are some unpleasant facts that all of us must face. First off, our bikes are limited to what you can carry. How much clothing can you (reasonably) pack? If riding two up, that compounds the problem. So how does one plan for the myriads of unpleasant conditions you may face? What can you do to **mitigate risk** as if you are shaking with the cold, your attention will wander, your reaction time will suffer, and your body will not quickly react to emergency situations. Shadows are our enemy in some ways as they hide loose leaves, potholes, road imperfections, and physical items that are laying in the road. As cold wx approaches, critters come out at dusk to feed and gather food for the coming winter and seek safety in the shadows of the trees and the terrain.

One of the first things you can do is to look at a long range wx report that covers your route and your destination. Don't forget to review what you might face coming home. Of note here, many of us will stretch our last day of riding to get home and thus sleep in our own beds. By doing that, you may be wet and cold plus you will be more tired than normal. You are coming off a lengthy ride that has physically taxed you. You might be tempted to speed a tad more and not be as attentive as you normally would be. It never seems to amaze me that no matter which direction I travel in the late afternoons in south Texas, the sun always seems to be in my face which makes matters even more of an issue. As you get closer to departure day, recheck the projected wx reports and adjust accordingly.

This may not hit on everyone but consider you have just come off summer and everything you do during that timeframe. That means vacations, ice cream, BBQ cookouts, ice cream, parties, ice cream, beer, ice cream…and many of us will gain a pound or two. We have talked before about one of the best ways to ride and pack is to have clothing that can be layered. Take a few minutes and pull your items out of the box or closet. Start with the initial layer. Does it fit? If your items are tight and uncomfortable, you have just put

yourself one step behind and one step to the left of where you want to be. Now put on the next layer. Can you still move by bending, reaching, grabbing…etc.? Can you swing your leg over your motorcycle? Many folks can get by with a long sleeve t-shirt, then a long sleeve heavy cotton or flannel shirt followed by a fleece/light weight jacket and then the outer jacket (perhaps with a liner) be it leather or like type of outer garment. With all this on, will the zipper still work? Many of these outer garments have zippered vents. Most are in the underarm area but may have front and back zippered vents as well. Make sure these zippers work. Believe it or not, you can lose body heat through the pockets of your jacket as well. If they have zippers, zip them up. Your fleece or light jacket (intermediate light layer) should have a high collar and be able to zip all the way up to your chin. Finally, something to look at now is will your rain suit fit over all this? There have been many times in my riding life that I have pulled out my rain suit to add as a wind break to allow the insulating layers to work more efficiently even when there wasn't a cloud in the sky, it was dry as a bone but was colder than the response you had from someone you were trying to date turning you down flat.

Don't forget a face/neck gator. One of those combined with a full-face helmet will allow you to ride in the most extreme conditions. One of the things that folks overlook are decent gloves. Some of you enjoy the merits of heated handgrips on your scoot. Suggest you ck to ensure this item still works as they tend to die or are inadvertently disconnected on that last "service" you had done during the summer. However, one still needs a heavier set of gloves for colder weather. So, do your gloves keep your hands and especially your fingers warm and can you operate the small controls on your handlebars? There are polypro glove liners out there, but some gloves don't work well with them as the stitching on your gloves is so tight that you now can't bend your fingers. One needs to make sure that this option works for you. If you use battery powered (heated) jackets, gloves, etc…, ck them out and ensure they still work. Do you still have the charger for these items or if they take batteries, do you have fresh spares?

Moving down the body, some folks will wear "winter longjohns" underwear. Works well but when you go indoors, you may start to overheat and sweat. Some bikes have seat heaters and that can help you out as well. For the rest of us, we have full or lower leg chaps. Both styles of chaps are excellent but depending on how much packing space you have, may determine your choice here. Last item to consider is your footwear. Boots made for MC riding are usually best. Many are water resistant or even supposedly "waterproof" (yeah right). Do you have a couple of pairs of decent boot socks? A wool blend sock tends to hold up better and will provide considerably more warmth than synthetic or cotton "athletic/sport" socks. For some, a pair of sock liners are a force multiplier for warmth.

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Boots are hard to pack so most folks only ride with one pair. Make sure you can walk in your boots. Seems like common sense but how many times have we seen fellow riders walking like Hermann Munster or having to change out of their boots to sneakers or other lightweight footwear when off the bike because the boots are uncomfortable to walk in? Many folks will purchase waterproof boot gaiters to wear over their boots to keep them dry. Putting on cold wet boots for the next day of riding can really bite into the fun factor of a ride. Boots take time to dry and once they get wet, all bets are off. Consider you may have to adjust your shifter peg based on the toe box of your footwear especially if you change from let's say "summer" boots to "winter" boots.

Also suggest you get familiar with cold weather injuries. Not really concerned with frostbite here as most of us don't ride in those extremes but exposed skin of the face, along with fingers and toes are where we need to be cognizant of. Hypothermia is probably the elephant in the room. Your body is doing its darndest to get warm but it can't catch up. Next thing you know your body core temp starts to dip. It only takes a few degrees, and you could soon be in real trouble. Getting wet accelerates the onset of hypothermia. Know the symptoms. Take more breaks, get warm, and dress according to the conditions. Check your riding buddies out as there is nothing cool about wrapping yourself around a tree. Also realize that your backseater can't move around in the saddle like a driver can. They are stuck in one position for many hours at a time. It is not uncommon that they feel the cold before you do and it won't be long before they are miserable. Don't be afraid to "call it a day" short of your planned destination.

Last item I will hit on is to make sure you eat a decent set of meals and drink plenty of water. Folks can become dehydrated even in cold weather. Hot coffee/tea is nice as a pick me up but won't replace good old water to make your body hum. When travelling, don't party all night either, get some decent sleep as that will set you up for the next day. See you on the road. F2