

Cycling in Wet Weather

by Peter Nicholson & Dario Fredrick

Rain. For many cyclists it means indoor training or taking a rest day. But with the right equipment, gear and mindset, most wet days can still be productive training days and perhaps even enjoyable.



Winter temperatures in Northern California are relatively mild, but it's also our rainy season. Coincidentally, this is the time that cyclists are ramping up their base mileage and building for the season to come. So unless you prefer to be a fair-weather rider, wet winters mean riding in the rain. Here's how to get the most out of those wet days on the bike.

Equipment

Winterizing your bike starts with the tires. With wet roads and more debris on the road, heavier, more puncture-resistant tires are a must. There is nothing worse than getting multiple flats in the rain. Also, be sure to have two spare tubes and a good pump. You can run your tires ~5-10 PSI lower than you might on dry days to give a little more traction in those low-friction conditions.

Water and grit on rims can wear down brake pads at an alarming pace – it is entirely possible to run through a set of cheap pads in just one long ride that requires a lot of braking. Before you leave on a rain ride, check and make sure that you have adequate pad left and that brakes are properly adjusted, perhaps beginning the ride with pads a bit closer to the rim than normal to allow for wear.

Fenders are a must, particularly if you plan on any group rides. Training with friends goes a long way toward making wet rides more bearable – unless you're getting a face full of rooster tail off the wheel you're trying to hold.



More than anything, your fenders will keep you a lot dryer, as most of the drenching that happens comes from tire spray from the road. There are several styles of fenders, with the sturdiest requiring a frame and fork with eyelets, but quick-release style do an admirable job of keeping your friends (and your backside) out of the spray, attaching to any bike quickly with an easy to use, tool-free rubber grommet arrangement.

Apparel

So the bike is ready to roll, now for the rider. Staying completely dry in real rain (and being able to actually pedal your bike) just isn't possible – even in truly waterproof garments like the classic clear plastic rain jacket you'll end up getting soaked from the inside out due to excessive sweat. So the goal is a balance of water resistance, breathability, and warmth. Rain pants, however are not very practical for pedaling, so keeping the legs warm with quality leg warmers is a must.



Keeping your extremities warm in wet weather is of utmost importance – gotta feel your fingers and feet to be able to shift and pedal! Weatherproof gloves and booties are the way to go, with their lightweight, wind-proof material keeping the digits toasty. For really wet and cold conditions, we also recommend glove liners, which are remarkably inexpensive and effective at increasing the warmth of any glove.

For colder wet days, waterproof shoe covers do a great job, as some even combine a neoprene inner membrane with a waterproof shell. And while much of the heat we lose on the bike is through our heads, modern helmets are designed to keep you cool. A cycling cap from your favorite Belgian team may look pro and keep the rain out of your eyes.



Eye protection is a challenge when most cycling glasses either fog up or coat with beads of moisture. Ever roll out on a wet day wearing a pair of glasses, only to stow them in a pocket after the first five minutes of your ride? Spray from the road can be toxic for the eyes, given the byproducts of autos (oil, rubber, brake pads, etc.). Try lighter colored lenses, such as clear or yellow tint and add RainX, an automotive product that repels water when applied to glass or plastic.

After the Ride

So you've outfitted your ride and yourself with the best gear, managed to get in a solid training session, and are back at home. Unfortunately, you're still probably wet and cold and your bike is a mess. Look out for #1 first, and immediately change into warm and dry clothes, stretch out those tired muscles, and get something warm to eat and drink. When estimating your caloric output, keep in mind that the body spends extra energy regulating core temperature on those wet, colder days. Proper recovery is doubly important in inclement weather. Once you've stabilized, take a minute to give your ride some TLC. Even if it's only rinsing off the muck and giving the chain some lube, spending a few minutes post-ride will greatly extend the life of the drivetrain. Once a week, it is also good idea to give your bike a proper cleaning with hot, soapy water,

thoroughly lube the chain and derailleurs, and pull the seatpost to allow any water that's snuck inside to evaporate.

While nothing compares to a nice ride under blue skies, if you mind a few details you can achieve your training goals in even the worst conditions. Prepare your equipment, keep yourself warm and (relatively) dry, and take care of both you and your bike after the ride, and you'll be ready to get back out there again tomorrow, getting stronger all the while.

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