

Rain, Rain Go Away, Come Again Some Other Day

Ok, before you get upset about my asking for drought conditions, I obviously am asking for dry riding weather. Jan and I have experienced two wet weather rides recently, and as you know, they aren't pleasant. They occurred when we were coming home from Wing Ding and also on our ride home last week from vacationing in South Carolina. I was searching some motorcycle safety websites recently and came across an article titled "Riding in Foul Weather Conditions". As I read it I could relate too much of the information therein, based on our recent wet weather experiences.

Here are some excerpts I think are interesting and informative: only a freak motorcycle rider enjoys riding in foul weather, but that doesn't mean you'll never do it. Rain, ice and snow (snow, what's that?) can all be surprises, so you want to know how to handle them.

Rain poses two major challenges: traction and vision. Traction seems to be the primary concern for most riders. Watch out for metal fixtures such as manhole covers and bridge gratings, painted areas and places where built up oil and grease have not washed off. These become much more slippery when wet. However, there is still a surprising amount of traction on clean, but wet, asphalt and concrete.

You can test traction with your rear brake. Make sure your tires are in good shape and you have a reasonable amount of tread depth. If you do this at moderate speeds on a flat straight road, it won't become a thrill ride. Avoid locking up the rear wheel on a steeply crowned road where it will tend to slide downhill and out of line. Even if you ride a trike, as we do, or a sidecar, traction should be a concern. Just think about a time when traction played a part in a driving experience in your car. Jan and I can relate, and I'm sure you can too. Once you have a feel for traction, you should have some idea of how much you can safely ask the tires to deliver under breaking and cornering on a wet surface.

Be very careful of any large metal surfaces or metal sections running parallel to your direction of travel, including expansion joints, metal plates and railroad tracks. Painted surfaces can be almost as slippery as metal.

Turning a motorcycle on slick, wet surfaces demands a smooth touch. Braking abruptly or making a sudden steering input could get you in trouble. Additionally, initiate your turns a bit more gradually. Downshift smoothly, engage the clutch a bit slower than usual, and avoid sudden throttle changes. Use a lower gear to reduce the forces reaching the rear tire. Apply the brakes in such a way that the tires are not loaded abruptly. Allow more space to stop or slow down. Also, make sure that drivers around you have time to react to your moves.

You already know that drivers have trouble seeing you. This is an even larger issue in the rain, low light, obscured windows, and foggy windshield. Consider a bright rain suit and retro-reflective striping or panels. Also consider your own vision. Your view can be impaired by face shield fogging or a windshield that rises into your line of sight. Rain X does help disperse water on both face and wind shields.

The problem with riding in the rain became a very hazardous one for Ron Lantz and me when riding home from Wing Ding in Tulsa, Oklahoma. It rained so hard and was so foggy that twice we decided to stop and wait for the weather to clear. As the ride leader, I was having trouble seeing the taillights of the vehicle directly in front of me. That is time to pull off the road, get a cup of coffee and wait.

Our mantra has always been that the ride should be just as interesting, safe and fun as the destination. Let's do everything we can to arrive alive!

Ride Safe, Have Fun
Joe and Gracie