



Wet Weather Riding

You might as well face it - sooner or later in your lifetime of riding motorcycles, you're going to end up riding in wet weather. Rain-soaked pavement brings with it a whole new set of rules, and the consequences for riders careless enough to forget them can be pretty severe. Skilled wet weather riding just requires that you practice some basic techniques and tactics that will enable you to continue enjoying the ride instead of skittering down the road.

White knuckle fisted riding techniques that you can get away with in the dry will put you on the ground in the blink of an eye when it's wet.

First rule of rain riding: BE SMOOTH. Unlike a car's four relatively massive tire contact patches, the narrow pair of footprints laid down by a motorcycle are easily overpowered on wet pavement. Though today's premium tires possess impressive wet weather traction, accessing that capability requires smooth control inputs to gradually load the tire in order to avoid blasting through the rain shrunk traction range.

This means no quick flick GP-pilot turn entries or handful of throttle turn exits; no jerking on the brakes like you've been jolted with electricity. Just apply smooth, firm control actions that allow you to positively sense tire traction, without being overly timid. This takes some practice, but once you learn to initiate a turn or apply the brakes smoothly in the wet, you'll find a surprising amount of maximum braking or steering deflection is available.

Panic stops in the wet require a lot of practice and concentration. Remember, wet discs and pads have a certain "lag" time between initial applications and braking power that can easily catch you off guard; skilled brake modulation is a must here.

You also have to scan for future traction as well. Painted surfaces, tar strips, smooth pavement (bricks, non roughened concrete) and metal (manhole covers, bridge grates, railroad tracks) become extremely slick when wet. Puddles can hide deep potholes or mask a slippery surface beneath. And be especially cautious of riding through areas where cars leak fluids, like the center of the lane, approaching intersections, or freeway on/off ramps.

Increased reaction and stopping distances mean you have to leave extra room to permit evasive action without pressing the limits of wet traction. You also need to increase your surveillance of traffic ahead to help you predict possible trouble spots, look even farther down the road than usual. And if you thought drivers had a hard time seeing you in dry weather, think how it must be in the wet. Awareness means survival.

Although helmet shield fogging is a major problem in wet weather, there are various anti-fogging compounds available. Most helmets today allow you to crack the shield open slightly, allowing defogging ventilation while still providing eye protection.

Last but not least, make sure you stand out like a sore thumb in traffic. Running with your high beam on and wearing a brightly colored rain suit will make you considerably more visible during the day, while reflective material will help you stand out at night. Once again, your best defense is to stay out of harm's way and never take it for granted that they'll see you.

So H.O.G. 93 Members approach wet weather riding with trepidation; others seem to enjoy the way it heightens their awareness and concentration. Hopefully, by using the tactics and techniques we've mentioned here, you'll gain the confidence necessary to have fun even when the ride turns rainy.