



Wet Weather Riding

No one likes riding in the wet. Most of us avoid it. But, at some stage, chances are you'll have to do it. Knowing what to expect when riding in the rain, and being prepared for it, goes a long way to remaining safe on your Harley-Davidson.

Traction

The first 10 to 15 minutes of riding in the rain is the most dangerous. Rainwater mixes with the oil, dirt and road debris that has been sitting on the surface to create a greasy, slippery coating on the road. Your tyres are designed to cut through this muck but they can only do so much. Research shows that a motorcycle will only have about 75% to 80% of maximum traction in wet weather. In order to compensate for this, there are a number of things we can do.

The first thing is trying to ride as 'smooth' as possible. Riding in the wet requires smooth application of the clutch, throttle and brakes, as wet weather riding is a lot less forgiving than dry weather riding when it comes to errors of under or over-application of the bike's controls.

Try to set your corner speed in advance, do your accelerating and braking in a straight line, and gently but firmly apply your clutch, throttle and brakes to maintain traction. Keep your head and eyes up to identify hazards well ahead of time so you can make smooth adjustments. Remember to look where you want to go.

'Aquaplaning' is the term used to describe when a tyre cannot channel all the water out from under itself and it starts to 'surf' on top of the water. This also means that traction has been lost. Keeping your speed below 90km/h

will reduce most of this risk, but there are no guarantees. If you do start to aquaplane, do not steer, lean or apply any brakes. Rather, try to maintain your direction, throttle back gently and look ahead where you want to go.

Scanning the road surface for hazards such as puddles and smooth black tarseal can help avoid potential aquaplaning situations. Riding in the wheel track of the vehicle ahead may also help avoid these situations as the tyres of that vehicle will disperse the water on the road so your tyre won't have to work as hard.

Along with the risk of hydroplaning in pooling or ponding water, you must also be aware of varying road surfaces reacting differently to rain. Steel plates, dirt and gravel, painted road markings, and railway tracks all change their coefficient of friction (grip) to differing degrees when wet. Try to avoid them if at all possible. If they are unavoidable, 'smooth' riding is again the solution.

Checking your tyre pressure is correct and your tyre tread depth is adequate prior to all rides is the easiest way to ensure maximum traction. Your tyre pressure should be at the Harley-Davidson recommended rating (plus or minus 1 or 2 psi is fine) and your tyres should have enough tread remaining to channel away water.

Visibility

Rain, snow, mist and fog produce low light conditions which limit your ability to see clearly and limit others' ability to see you. Other vehicles, particularly large trucks, also produce road spray which combines with the weather to 'hide' you from other motorists. In order to increase your chances of being seen, wearing reflective and high visibility clothing is a good idea.

But, let's be real. The majority of HOG riders choose not to wear high-viz gear. The best alternate option therefore is to create as much contrast with what you're wearing as possible. Patches and badges work well to break up the black background of a leather jacket, coloured helmets or those with graphics are more visible than black ones, and riding with headlights on (now a legal requirement) breaks up the outline of the bike from the front. Even adding more chrome to your bike can help too, as it helps to create more reflective surfaces thereby making you and your bike more visible.

Protection

Throttle, clutch and brake controls on your bike all require feeling and dexterity of your hands and feet. Once your hands and feet get wet, it will only be a short time before they get cold and you reduce or lose your ability to manipulate your motorcycle's controls. Waterproof boots and gloves are a really good idea to prevent this occurring. Keeping your torso warm (i.e. your core temperature) also helps in this regard. Being wet and cold will also distract you, something you don't want to happen while you are riding in the rain.

Being able to see other road users is just as important as them seeing you. If you do

anticipate riding in the wet, make sure you have clear lenses for your glasses or a clear visor to allow you to see in less-than-ideal light. Be aware of fogging of your glasses or visor in rainy conditions. Opening your visor slightly or moving your glasses further away from your eyes will permit air to flow on the inner side of the lenses and keep them clear. Anti-fog cream or visor inserts can help to alleviate this problem too.

At night time, every drop of rain lying on the road, in puddles, on your windscreen, on your glasses or visor, refracts light given off by headlights, tail lights and street lights into your straining eyes. Add flashing emergency lights to this equation and you may overload your optical inputs. The best way to avoid this is to try and focus on the white line on the left your lane at the point where your headlight's illumination disappears. This will prevent you being dazzled by oncoming lights and help to position you on the road.

Knowing what to expect and being prepared for riding in the wet, significantly increases your margin of safety. Riding smoothly, being as visible as possible and making sure you are protected, will go a long way to ensuring you continue to *Ride and Have Fun*.