

Winter Cycling



I. Intro – Why cycle in winter?

Folks new to winter cycling are often amazed that anyone can remain upright on a bike on snow and ice. But after you have been on a bike for a few days, you come to realize that the situation is quite manageable.

II. Winterizing you bike

Easy winterizing steps:

- lower your seat about an inch
- slightly reduce your tyre pressure (to the lower end of the recommended tyre pressure as given on the side of your tyre)
- adjust your fenders so they can accommodate some snow build-up on your tyres
- clean and lube your bike before it snows and regularly throughout winter

More involved winterizing steps:

- Studded tyres vs. knobby tyres
 - o Studs are great on black ice and hard-packed snow, but are useless in fresh snow and will slow you down and wear down quickly on clear pavement
 - o Knobby tyres with a centrebead will provide traction on fresh snow, slush and hard-packed snow and won't slow you down so much on clear pavement
- Single speeding
 - o Multi speeds are not really necessary for Winnipeg city riding
 - o Are easier to maintain in the winter
- Platform pedals to accommodate big boots
- Straight bars for greater control
- Sealed cartridge hubs on wheels
 - o Seal out water and grit making your wheels last longer

III. Winter cycling clothing

- Dress so that you're a bit cold when you start riding – you'll soon warm up
- Layering
 - o Wicking fabric next to skin (usually blend of polyester and nylon – can either be found at sports stores or just get a plain polyester shirt second hand)
 - o Insulating layer over that (wool is great)
 - o Windproof outer layer
- Rather than adding or removing layers, try speeding up or slowing down to regulate your body temperature

- Headgear:
 - o Good regulator of heat
 - o Various combinations of balaclava, touque, scarf, facemask and goggles work well in different combinations
 - o Plug up helmet vents with tape or a helmet cover

- Hands:
 - o Mittens keep your hands warmer as your fingers are together
 - o Gloves allow for greater dexterity and ease of braking
 - o Many people use snowmobile gloves for very cold days

- Eyes:
 - o Shades (clear, yellow) to keep snow and water out
 - o Glasses – to prevent fogging use very thin layer of glycerine-based soap (like Pears) or gel toothpaste

- Feet:
 - o Boots and booties
 - o Avoid clipless pedals as they're not warm and may stop functioning with ice buildup
 - o Use plastic bags over your socks to stay dry on super sloppy days

- Visibility
 - o Wear light clothing and use lights and reflectors as vehicles will not be expecting to see cyclists in winter

IV. Winter riding tips

- Riding techniques depend greatly on road conditions
- It is easiest to develop winter riding skills by continuing to ride into the winter (instead of starting to ride in the middle of winter). You will also notice your riding skills improve remarkably during the season.
- Cross tyre ruts and railroad tracks as perpendicularly as you can
- Check the road conditions periodically by braking lightly

Black ice:

- one of the most insidious winter riding hazards

Turning

- Turning on black ice is best accomplished by turning slowly and keeping the bike as upright as possible. This may involve offsetting your body to the side (toward the direction you want to turn) while at the same time keeping the bike upright and turning your handlebars. This keeps most of your tyre tread in contact with the road and also avoids putting lateral force on the tyre at the contact point.

Braking

- As black ice is super slippery, braking must be done carefully and primarily with your rear brake. Try to keep most of your weight over the rear wheel. Keeping the front wheel rolling will allow you to steer and means you have a greater chance of remaining upright.
- Try to ride on grit or sand stuck on black ice or on fresh snow as much as possible as this provides more traction than ice. Even light snow on black ice may provide more traction.

V. Useful items to have on the road

- lock de-icer or a lighter (to thaw frozen locks)
- a spare tube (many businesses will be happy to let you use their foyer to change your tyre)
- bus fare
- an extra layer (in case you need to walk)

Resources:

www.icebike.org

www.mec.ca (click in the “learn” link; then click on the “cycling” link)

<http://www.allweathersports.com/winter/winter.html>

Please note that Natural Cycle will be offering bike maintenance and repair courses at various levels in the new year.

For more information, please contact Natural Cycle at 957-5762 or inquiry@naturalcycle.ca.

