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**Experts offer tips to survive riding in the rain**

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As Tory Grant slid into some rain gear, the manager of Tacoma's Old Town Bicycle confessed a little secret: It's hard for him to get motivated to go for a bike ride when the weather gets nasty.

He's not alone.

"You know, you hem and you haw for a couple of hours, then you finally do it," Grant said. "But once you do it, it's not that bad."

Whether riding for fitness or commuting, the bike doesn't have to stay in the garage during the cold and rainy seasons. But cyclists who hit the road need to prepare for the outdoor conditions during the fall and winter months.

Here are some tips for winterizing yourself and your ride from local cycling experts Carla Gramich touring captain for the Tacoma Wheelmen Bicycle Club, Chuck Ayers, executive director of Cascade Bicycle Club, Carol Davis, president of the Tacoma Wheelmen and cycling advocate Bob Myrick.

### **Headgear**

Helmets, of course, are a must any time of year, but when it's cold and rainy you need a little extra. "Those vents that are nice when it is warm are a wind tunnel during the winter," said Gramlich, who uses a helmet cover (\$20-45) to keep rain out. Other riders wear skullcaps (\$12-30) under their helmets.

### **Lights**

On gray winter days, lights aren't so much for seeing as being seen. Lights (\$10 and more) are needed on the handle bars and on the seat stem so you can be seen from ahead and behind, Grant said. And don't forget to keep your lights charged so they don't fail you, said Ayers.

### **Eye protection**

Grant said eye protection (\$20 and more) is a must in the winter to keep rain and road debris out of your eyes. "Some riders even use yellow lenses because they'll help you see a little clearer," he said. Davis puts Rain-X windshield treatment on her glasses to give herself a clearer view.



## **Jacket**

Grant said a good riding jacket (\$40 and more) is the most important item for riding in the wet and cold. Unlike a typical jacket, cycling jackets are longer in the back to, as he said, “keep your butt dry.” Don’t be afraid to pick a jacket with bright colors. Like lights, a colorful jacket is a good way to assure you are spotted by motorists.

## **Pants**

Waterproof pants or riding tights are important for staying warm. “Be warm, not distracted by misery,” Davis wrote in her club newsletter, “Cog-nitive Courier.” While a pair of riding pants could cost \$100 or more, some riders simply slip their polypropylene long underwear over their bike shorts. While this might help with the cold, it’s won’t help much with the rain.

## **Layers**

Dressing in layers is vital. “It’s not just rain that’s going to get you wet,” Grant said. “If you are sweating, you’re going to get wet, too.” Ayers suggested a jacket with good vents and or removable sleeves, or a vest with arm warmers. “(They) are incredibly helpful for proper ventilation,” Ayers said.

## **Fenders**

Putting fenders (\$20 and more) on your bike is a good way to keep you a little drier. “Plus, people riding behind you will really appreciate that,” Davis said.

## **Footwear**

Toes go cold fast on a bike, so it seems every cyclist has a trick for keeping their feet warm. Grant wears neoprene booties (\$30 and up) over his shoes. Gramlich wears wool socks. Some riders even slip hand warmers into their shoes.

## **Gloves**

Most gloves aren’t waterproof because of all the seams, Grant said, but keeping your hands warm is important. You can buy a pair of riding gloves (\$15 and more), but some cyclists save money by using other gloves including ski gloves or even latex gloves under another pair of gloves.

## **Storage**

Myrick said storage-like saddle bags (\$40 and more) or even a backpack is important for several reasons. First, storage gives cyclists a place to discard layers as they warm up. It also gives them a place to keep work clothes clean while commuting through the elements. Grant said riders often think knobby tires give them more traction. That’s true in many situations, but not on wet pavement. “It’s less rubber touching the road,” he said. Tires with a slicker surface are a must.

## **ADD TIME**

Ayers allows extra time for his rides in winter and fall. “Whether it’s riding a heavier bike with fenders or riding in the rain, it adds minutes to my commute,” he said.

## **Plan route**

It might seem counterintuitive to ride on a highway rather than a backstreet, but Davis said it could actually be a good idea in poor weather. Highways have wider shoulders, and there are people around to help if you have trouble, she said. Free Pierce County cycling maps are available at most local bike shops.

## **Be (extra) alert**

Staying alert is always good advice, but it’s especially important in the winter when there are extra hazards. Leaves, road stripes, steel plates and grates are all slippery when wet.

## **Clean up**

Riding in the rain is a good way to shorten the life of your bike chain if you don’t take care of it, Grant said. He suggested lightly rinsing your chain – never use high pressure – then apply a degreaser (\$6-\$60).