



Where the Rubber Hits the Road

With the winter weather swings from rainy to frosty, cyclists are facing the challenge of slippery road conditions.

In our November issue we dealt with visibility and this month we are focused on what is arguably the most important area of winter cycling: Where the “Rubber hits the Road”.

Trail Bicycles owner Jeff Beeston advises that “wet winter road conditions are magical for attracting thorns, shards of glass, and sharp pieces of rock to your tires and puncturing tubes. So, get your tires checked, consider some sort of puncture resistance and keep at least two tubes and a good pump handy in case of a flat—or two. Some riders like to have wider tires with more channels for better grip on wet pavement. Tires with a softer compound and more grooved tread are available for winter riding and for that occasional cold snap with snow and ice, we suggest winter tires with spikes and a wide tread pattern which will clear snow, increase traction and provide more security. They are more expensive and slower but much safer when the road turns icy.”



It’s cold, it’s wet, it’s windy! Winter cycling has its drawbacks but with some preparation, rider awareness and good clothing, it can be totally doable. car drivers may have a more difficult time seeing them in the dimmer light and adjusting vehicle travel on slippery roads. It is important to be extra vigilant about frozen water, metal bridges and manhole covers, wooden structures and painted street surfaces, and, being more careful on any surface that is shaded (especially in the mornings). Avoiding heavy braking, especially with the front brakes, will reduce the possibility of slide outs.

The MEC website suggests the following adjustments in winter tires:

Road bikes: Not ideal in snowy or icy climates, as slick tires don’t provide adequate grip, but they are fine in rainy places that see occasional frost. If tire and brake clearance allows it, go for as wide a tire as possible (700 x 30 or more). You probably won’t have enough clearance to run studded tires on a road bike.

Cyclocross and hybrid: These bikes make great winter commuters. Their tire clearance allows large 700C tires and fenders. Use studded 700C tires in snowy or icy conditions and in milder winters, a large volume treaded 700C tire (700 x 30+) run at lower pressure provides good grip.

Mountain bikes: In moderate conditions, regular knobby tires inflated to a lower PSI provide good traction. If you expect very snowy or icy conditions, studded winter tires and a wide tread pattern substantially increase grip. The majority of grip is achieved via the front tire. If you opt for just one studded tire, put it on the front.

Fat bikes: The ultimate for winter commuting and trail riding. With substantial tire clearance, they’re like a mountain bike with snowshoes. Built for 4 to 5-inch tires and 100mm+ rims, fat bikes are built for snowy, icy or mucky conditions. The tire size adds traction and allow you to roll at a very low tire pressure. For extremely icy conditions, add studded tires.