



WHAT TO WEAR FOR WEARY WINTER

By Kenneth Lundgren

Many riders just do not like riding in the cold. I've never had this problem, actually look forward to this time of the year... Perhaps it's the Scandinavian in me, enjoying being out in the cold conditions... I know for a fact that I melt in the heat – any races 82+ degrees and I'm suffering dearly! So perhaps my body is naturally good at maintaining warmth in the colder months... But I do enjoy riding outside because I always dress properly, preparing for both the conditions and the type of ride I'll be doing...

I've always been a stickler about dressing appropriately for every ride, stalking the weather websites and figuring out what the conditions will be and what I should wear... Over time and with experience, you find out what temperatures require the allotted amount of winter dress-up. I'm going to share how I personally attack the winter months, and perhaps you can find some things in here that will help you dress more appropriately, allowing you to battle the conditions logically so you can get steady workouts accomplished.

By early-fall, temperatures are already getting into the lower 60s... Eddy Merckx once wrote, "Always cover the knees if it's in the 50s." And he's right: you only get one set of knees, and once they're done, they're done. I like to keep my knees covered if it's 65 or under... It's funny, you never get cold knees... The legs, for me, are a part of the body that never really feel cold on colder days or hot on hotter days – they're just there! But keep the knees covered and warm. When warm, your knees are more elastic. The muscles around the joint relax more between contractions, contributing to a limber feel. Warm synovial fluid, your knee's lubricant, is also less viscous. Lubricants work best when warm.

On cold days, you'll see riders, even with a helmet cover, Gortex jacket, and wearing SHORTS! People, cover the knees! Working connective tissues while cold can cause micro-tears. Cartilage in particular has very little blood flow and heals slowly. Once roughened, cartilage tends to get worse rather than better and surgery to cut away the roughened portion may only provide temporary relief. The harm that may result can lead to chronic conditions of the sort we generalize as tendonitis and arthritis.

Cover the knees. Be cautious when dressing – better to be too warm than too cold... The knee, a joint that is commonly impossible to rehabilitate to 100% after injured, is made up largely of bone, cartilage, tendon and ligament – in short, a slow healing joint! In regard to knee pain, PREVENTION is the name of the game...

When I prepare for the cold, I'm a big fan of layering, which is probably the most important word in this article... For years, I commuted to work on the bike, 22 miles each way. In the winter, I'd be riding home at night in 30-degree weather. However, if dressed properly, the cold air has little effect on you...

60-65 degrees, I usually just wear arm and leg warmers. Never have been a fan of knee warmers, as they have a tendency to slide down the thigh...

55-60 degrees, now you may want to wear a thin team vest and some light gloves, breathable perhaps...

50-55 degrees and I put on a Hind headband, cover the shoes with Giordana toe warmers, and use a light vest or a long sleeve therma-fleece jersey... I bought this black Pearl Izumi therma-fleece jersey over ten years ago, and I still use it to this day, a

very versatile piece of clothing... I can wear it when its 50 degrees, or I can wear it when its 35 degrees, with a winter vest and arm warmers over the long sleeves – makes for a warm ride... The fact that it's breathable is KEY... All you need to do is layer...

45-50 degrees and how it's starting to get a touch cold. If I'm dressing lighter up top, I use the light vest. Or I can wear a poly base layer, a long-sleeve jersey, then a team jersey, with arm warmers and headband, and I'm toasty. If I get hot, I can either unzip the vest or roll the arm warmers down and the arms are still covered... As mentioned, layering is 100% key. I also have light booties I use when the temperatures drop below 50, and have a vast array of gloves... I love using wool liner gloves, as wool wicks moisture well and keeps your hands incredibly dry... I have a light pair of Nike windproof gloves, and with Smartwool liners, I can use these when it's 40 and up, a terrific combo...

40-45 degrees and now you have to watch what you're doing out there... I love Hind products, bought my headband and skullcap back in days when the Internet was NOT a useful tool for shopping! Now, you can find Hind stuff easily, but this wasn't the case back in the day! The Hind skullcap is by FAR the best I've ever used, very warm, very elastic, stretches down well below your ears. I hate how most skullcaps either (1) don't stretch that well or (2) don't stay on the ears, not covering them completely – they usually recoil back up again... Annoying!

At 40-45, you may also want to consider breaking out the winter bibs. I have to admit that I love Giordana, feel they make a superior product. Here's a good piece of advice: don't chince when it comes to buying cycling apparel – you certainly get what you pay for. The Giordana stuff I've bought is VERY durable and very warm, very stretchy, always retains original shape... I ride the hell out of the clothing I have, so I can offer a good opinion here. I've used a ton of different manufacturers over the years, and honestly Giordana and to a lesser extent Pearl Izumi have proven to have the best stuff... I've seen many products fall apart with their stitches, the fabrics get overstretched, but I've had good luck with Giordana and Pearl...

At 35-40 degrees, I have two options depending on the ride... At this temperature, I don't recommend going out and riding at much more than Tempo intensity... If I'm looking at a Tempo ride, I'll layer again, perhaps use the team windproof winter vest, use my winter Garneau gloves. When it's around this temperature and under, I use SideTrak neoprene booties, very light, form-fitting, and WARM!

If I'm doing an Endurance or Recovery Ride, I'll put on a long sleeve jersey and break out the Giordana Windtex jacket... It's thin but windproof – and WARM! It's not so breathable, so if you start hammering you'll sweat and overheat and cause severe discomfort. But on easier rides, you just put this on with your winter tights and you're good to go! If you start to get warm, just start unzipping the jacket and you'll get immediate relief. For long rides, the feet and hands are typically the hardest parts to keep warm, so if you have adequate gloves and booties, you should be fine...

Regarding the feet, I have those heavy neoprene booties that I've found work well, but if temps are 40 and below, I stick those packaged chemical Toe Warmers on my toes (www.toewarmer.com/g_toewarm.htm). They're adhesive and thin, stick right to the top of my sock. I don't even feel them when I'm riding – except my entire foot is cozy and warm! I'm prone to cold feet, so I find this as a useful trick... They're like \$1.50 a package, and in the beginning of winter I'll buy an entire season's worth. Being comfortable, even for an hour-long ride, is easily worth it to me...

I am not a fan of wearing wool socks. These socks are usually thicker, giving my feet almost zero wiggle room in my already tight-fitting Nike shoes. With less space and zero room, my feet get cold quickly – it is what it is... Some riders have winter shoes that are a touch bigger, are much more accommodating for thicker socks, but I don't do that, just have one pair of cycling shoes I use on all my bikes, during all times of the year.

Hot Tronics are another alternative, which is a heated footbed. You look like an inmate under house arrest with wires and ankle straps on your booties, but it's worth it if your feet are cold. In the cold, if you do a brisk group ride, your feet will go numb faster, and there's nothing worse than cold feet!!! Prepare well and enjoy the ride...

At 30-35 or colder when outdoors, you should really be doing endurance-based work, Recovery Rides, perhaps mild Tempo work... For most riders, other types of riding are best done indoors...

Diversify your cycling wardrobe and always give yourself options... I don't mind the cold, so I don't mind starting some rides a touch underdressed because I'll warm up... If you're not comfortable with this, dress appropriately with layers and then strip down. I have a large collection of clothing, and I use every single piece.

Here is a list of key items you'll want:

For the arms, you'll need three pairs of arm warmers: thin, medium-weight, and heavy therma-fleece.

For the hands, I recommend thin windproof gloves, 2-3 sets of wool liner gloves, medium winter gloves, and heavy winter gloves.

You'll want a light, windproof vest and a heavy winter vest. Again, vests are great because they cover your neck, and with no arms you don't overheat. If you do get too warm, you can unzip...

You'll want a thick, therma-fleece long-sleeve jersey and plenty of poly base layers. They stink up the joint fast, so you'll need plenty of them, 5-8... In addition to this LS jersey and vest, if you want to simplify things on easier days, I recommend having a thin windproof jacket, which will prove for a WARM ride...

For your head, you'll need a thin headband for mild conditions, skullcaps for 35-45, and a full balaclava when the temps are below 30-35, or if you're riding at night...

For the legs, simple therma-fleece leg warmers and an expensive pair of winter bibtights. The best bibtights are windproof in the front, fleeced on the inside, and breathable in the back, an ideal combination for ideal comfort...

For your feet, simple toe covers, a thin pair of windproof booties, and heavy neoprene or therma-fleece booties. Nice to have a selection so you can dress appropriately for each ride... As mentioned, I also love using chemical toe warmers to keep the feet cozy when it's 40 and below...

If you're doing a hard group ride, I recommend packing a second pair of liner gloves. After the coffee stop, your hands will be cold and wet. Switch liner gloves and problem solved!

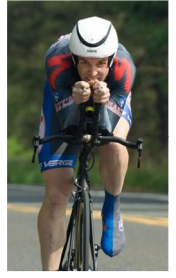
One point I want to make is when you buy stuff, try it on! Each company sizes their clothing differently... You want these winter add-ons to be almost a second skin, not too loose or long. Take the time and try on different sizes, different manufacturers, and see what fits best. As a tall and slener rider, I've found that most Giordana stuff fits me like a glove, but this may not be the case for everyone...

Remember, the name of the game is layering. As you warm up, you just want to be able to peel away or unzip... The more you ride, the better you'll know how much or how little you'll need to wear. Simply record these things – the temps, what you wore, how you felt – in your training diary and very quickly you'll be armed with sufficient info to plan for future winter rides...

When buying your winter gear, don't chince out – buy the best stuff. These products will last a long time and keep you warmer than cheaper alternatives – and the more comfy you are, the better you can train. The winter is a time of year you need to get steady hours on the bike, and for most this is much preferred outside... Don't let the cold conditions defeat you and limit how much time you can ride this year! I'm not against riding the trainer (however, I've seen many a rider burn out from excessive winter trainer riding!), but if I could train a rider all winter outdoors for the necessary workouts versus indoors, I would bet the house the outdoor rider would enjoy much stronger peaks and a much longer cycling season...

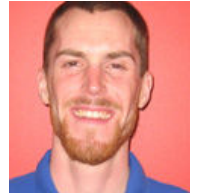
Thanks for reading and I hope to see you out there this winter!

Kenneth Lundgren



Kenneth Lundgren is a professional cycling coach and bike fit specialist for Elite Endurance Training Systems, a coaching service that offers training programs for cyclists and triathletes of all levels.

Ken also races for the Northeastern Hardware Cycling Team and is one of the area's top time trialists, finishing 2nd for consecutive years in the New Jersey Time Trial Cup. Northeastern Hardware is one of New England's strongest elite squads, competing in many of the area's Pro/1/2 events. The team has won the Garden State Cup for six consecutive years and looks to make it seven straight in 2010.



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