

# Cold Front

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**So you've decided to do some winter track day riding or even a bit of racing – reigning F3 champion Glen Williams tells us what to expect and prepare for.**

Thinking about attending a winter track day or competing in a club race day will surely bring visions of much wetness, coldness and it would be fair to expect a bit of that – however the enjoyment of being at the track (especially a race day) when you will likely have a hundred or so other like-minded 'madmen' out there taking on the elements is something worth experiencing. It's not quite up there with Sir Edmunds toppling of the highest

peak – but it can certainly be a challenging mental and physical test for any man, woman or machine.

So whilst the weather may not always be the greatest this need not stop you getting your high speed riding jollies satisfied, it just means a different approach and mindset.

## Prepare your steed

Turning up at the track with a set of slicks or a set of road tyres that closely resemble slicks is likely to spoil or shorten your day. For winter

track riding you should consider at minimum a spare set of tyres with a decent amount of tread, or if you're more serious a set of dedicated 'wet' race tyres. You probably have a 50/50 chance of it being dry – but with the effort you've put in just getting to the track, you may as well be prepared.

If you can't be bothered with the hassle of changing tyres / wheels then it might be worth considering a good quality set of sport-oriented, well grooved road tyres (e.g. Pirelli Diablo Corsa 3/Dunlop Roadsmart/Michelin Power One). These road type compounds will reach their ideal operating temperature much quicker (and at lower speeds) than the race style semi-grooved tyres or slicks.



Tyre pressures can often be reduced a smidgen, but this may only be by 0.5psi – 1psi or so. This makes the tyre squirm under load and work a bit harder, thus heating up a wee bit quicker and giving more grip and consistency.

If going racing in the winter – then tyre warmers become pretty important, get yourself a good reliable brand and whilst you are parked in the pits check that they are turned on regularly! It's amazing how leads and plugs around the bike can get accidentally unplugged. Going out on a cold track with cold tyres come race time can make you start believing in God pretty quickly.....

Beware in winter that a bike when leaving the pits after having tyre warmers on for a period may have its best performance within the first few laps. It is not that uncommon to come back into the pits after the race or track session with tyres being



colder than when you went out. So in effect the grip performance of the tyre can actually reduce the longer you are out on track. Weird but true especially if it's wet.

When at the track keep an eye on the temperature gauge on water-cooled bikes and warm the engine up before heading out on track. It's likely that the engine may run quite a bit cooler and the last thing you want is to 'cold seize' a piston/bore or run the engine at high rpm with an insufficient water jacket temperature. Placing some duct tape across the radiator (maybe 10% of its surface) is a trick that can reduce the cooling effect of the radiator and lift the engine temperature a bit quicker.

### Read the track

Getting a feel for the amount of grip at a specific track or on a specific winter's day is a bit of a dark science on occasions. Some tracks surfaces will by their very make up of tarmac offer more grip in cooler conditions than others.

Invercargill's Teratonga stands out in this respect as it offers substantial grip even when wet and cold. At a place like Taupo however, overnight



temperatures drop away to quite low levels and the high elevation of the track adds to the loss of energy from the tarmac. It may take until around lunchtime on a clear winter's day to get any respectable grip/temperature into the tarmac at Taupo.

On windy days the track temperature will remain at lot lower level (even if sunny). If the track becomes wet with a bit of wind around the track temperature falls through the floor as wind-chill on a wet cold surface has its effect.

A track's surface in wintertime can be a bit of a Jeckle and Hyde unfortunately and you need to closely monitor the conditions to be sure that you have the best possible machine set up and tyres fitted to match the conditions to try and maximize available grip.

### Shearing your tyres

Suspension settings will also need to be adjusted to suit the cooler condi-

tions - and often this will be in an attempt to stop soft race tyres 'cold shearing'. A tyre that 'cold-shears' looks a bit like its been attacked by a cheese grater and this severely compromises the tyre's ability to provide grip. It can also get very expensive, as often the only cure is to replace the tyre and try a different suspension setup.

If there are good suspension technicians at the track like Robert Taylor or Dukic Suspension asking them for their advice before you venture out on track may let you to avoid the cold shearing of your expensive rubber. Even an experienced racer/rider may be able to help in this regard.

Each bike is different in this respect and some will cold shear front tyres whilst some will only shear rears (some will do both). On occasions identical machines with the same rubber fitted will suffer completely different levels of cold-shear and often it simply comes down to how the machine is being ridden, or even the quality and management of their tyre warmers.

Cold shearing can turn up in summertime as well - but in warm conditions it is typically an example of a poor bike set up rather than a track temperature related affair.

### Personal preparation

It's not rocket science - it's winter you will get COLD! And the cold can affect the way you concentrate and the speed of your decisions out on the track. Try to keep warm when in the pits and consider wearing some thermals under your leathers. If you can afford a spare set of leathers and gloves - then changing into a nice dry warm set that you've had sitting in the car can be a very handy thing



plus it saves a shed load of weight compared to wet gear.

Do the best to keep your hands and feet warm - as these extremities give you the feel and the feedback needed to go fast and if they become numbed the control over your bike falls away very quickly! If it's cold and also wet, then once again the wind-chill factor has greater effect.

### Go forth and freeze

The stopwatch rules when it comes to racing - but in the winter your grip levels are almost certainly compromised and it is rare that you will get close to a mid-summer lap time. My suggestion is to accept this and get into your head accustomed to a lap time that represents a good performance for the cooler conditions. Pushing hard for those summertime speeds often ends in tears. Comparing your lap time with other competitors often indicates what a reasonable time for the conditions might be.

On particularly cool days it would pay to build up your speed slowly at first and try to assess the available grip 'on the day'.

Have fun out there and as the jingle goes "Ride to the conditions - and if they change increase or reduce your speed"

BRM

