



Solent Pirates

Youth Cycling Club

Solent Pirates Ten Rules To Riding in the Wet

There are a series of basic ideas and rules to follow in order to ride safely and fast in the wet.

While bad weather certainly adds a new variable, the basic principles of riding and racing remain the same. In fact, most racing principles are actually magnified, as tactics and bike handling play a larger role. When the rain starts to fall, here's what I keep in mind:

Rule 1: Tires have finite traction

Be wise with how you use what little traction you have. Braking, turning, and accelerating each apply force to your tires. Trying to do more than one at a time is a poor use of traction. In other words, don't brake while turning, and finish turning before accelerating back up to speed. Doing so is both faster and safer.

Rule 2: Tire pressure matters

Lower tyre pressure gives the tyre a larger, more supple contact patch on the ground, but it also makes potholes a greater threat. In the rain, I usually keep my tires softer (85 to 95 psi versus 110 – 120 psi) and take extra care to avoid rough road and pavement. I also expect riders near me to flat at any moment due to the increase of punctures in the wet (this is due to more debris being washed into the road and the water acting as a great lubricant to help those little stones and thorns get through your tyre).

Rule 3: Keep your centre of gravity over your bike

It's impossible to turn without leaning in, but leaning your bike instead of your body makes it easier to keep your mass over your tires and correct for a skid. If you lean inside with your body and your tires slide outside, the only place for you to go is down.

Rule 4: The inside of a corner is the usually the safest place to be

Crashes slide toward the outside, and you're more likely to get caught in a pileup if you aren't on the inside.

Rule 5: Not all road surfaces are the same

Metal, cobblestones, and paint are always slick compared with normal pavement but these surfaces are like ice when wet. More insidious are invisible patches of oil, which often lurk on roadsides where cars are normally parked. Watch for the road rainbows!

Rule 6: Right-handedness

What's this got to do with wet weather riding? One of the leading causes of bike spills in the wet is over-braking the front wheel. When you reach for your water bottle or something from your back pockets, use your right hand. This leaves your *left hand* ready to hit the rear brake lever in case you need to slow down or stop in a hurry. Even if you lock-up the back tire, you're much less likely to hit the deck.

Rule 7: Dry Your Brake Pads

Well before you need to stop you can dry your pads with a few pulses of the brakes. This action squeegees the water from the rim and will make the pads more efficient even if they are still damp. When you execute the pulse, use a light touch and start with the rear brake and then very lightly the front.

Rule 8: Weight Back When Stopping

If you primarily ride in dry conditions you probably don't give much thought to body position when stopping. In wet conditions you want to maximize rear wheel traction by shifting your weight further back in the seat. For emergency stops get out of the saddle and push your hips back over the rear wheel.

You can continue to pedal while braking the rear wheel which will make you far less likely to lock up and skid. The pedalling keeps the tire spinning even when significant brake pressure is applied. This will seem like a strange manoeuvre the first time you try it, so practice on dry roads until you get the hang of it.

Rule 9: Steer Into Corners

Avoid leaning into corners and focus more on turning the front wheel through the curve. This will keep the bike more upright and result in more downward force on the tires. And of course, take those corners a little slower!

Rule 10: Brake Before The Turn

The worse thing you can do in wet conditions is brake in a corner. Brake early, release before you make the turn and keep pedalling through the corner. If you do need to brake in a turn, use only the rear and apply pressure evenly and release quickly . . . don't stop pedalling.

Sadly, the sun doesn't always shine on race day. But with a few simple steps, every race can be safe and fast, no matter how wet the course is.

1. Plan your line in corners. Avoid sharp turns. Smooth, sweeping turns are less prone to skids.
2. Relax! The tighter your grip and arm tension, the more likely you are to crash. A little give in your arms will help you ride out a skid.
3. Press hard on the outside pedal as you enter the turn. This will help improve your traction.
4. Avoid the spray by staying close and a bit to one side of the wheel you're following.

Get Comfortable In The Rain

- Ride in the rain. You can't fake these conditions. Saddle up and get wet!
- Practice bike handling with some obstacles set up for a slalom course.
- Skid! Practice sideways skids. Maybe unclip one foot to catch yourself.
- Ride with some buddies to get used to the spray.