

DECEMBER SAFETY ARTICLE: "BABY, IT'S COLD OUTSIDE!"

The story of the first Christmas found in The Gospel According to Luke, is the gold standard of all Christmas stories, for without it, there wouldn't be such a thing as Christmas. One of my favorite modern-day Christmas stories, though, is Barbara Robinson's "The Best Christmas Pageant Ever".

First published in 1971, it is the story of six feisty siblings who had little more in their life than only each other. It details their first experience of understanding the true meaning of Christmas. The anti-hero, who has her own wrong-side-of-the-tracks charm, is little Imogene Herdman. While being told the story of the very first Christmas, she questions the storyteller about why the baby, Jesus, was wrapped in "wadded-up clothes".

Of course, we all understand that The Gospel According to Luke tells of the practice of babies being wrapped in swaddling clothes, not wadded-up clothes, and is a practice that is still used two thousand years later to keep babies warm, safe, and happy.

As adults, we find being swaddled-up in blankets a little constrictive, especially those of us who are motorcycle enthusiasts that thrive on riding as long as road conditions allow. While modifications to your bike's tires are imperative, if you wish to travel in icy conditions or snow, you may find that simply modifying your riding apparel can extend your riding season during the times when the roads are clear of winter's precipitation.

Heated apparel, grips and seats are some of the simplest and most effective ways there are of keeping your body temperature up while fighting off the cold and the wind chill that accompanies winter motorcycle riding. It is indeed expensive stuff, but most come with temperature controllers that allow you to adjust the heat to a comfortable level in most riding conditions. Just make sure that it is in good condition and works before you leave home and end up with frostbite!

If the luxury of battery or bike-powered warmth is beyond your cash supply, then...Shazam! Fear not! I bring you good tidings of great joy about other ways to keep warm!

Dressing in layers is always important as it creates air barriers that help defend you against the cold. Cotton should not be used as a base layer. Cotton is the enemy. Even on a cold day, you may very well work up a mild sweat while riding. Cotton absorbs moisture and doesn't allow it to evaporate. That moisture will cool your skin and steal your heat. I don't like having my heat stolen, so using a synthetic base layer will keep you dry and allow for better air flow.

On top of your base layer, use any kind of insulation that can keep you warm. A good layer or two of thin, loose-fitting fleece will help provide breathability for moisture, yet enable thermal retention to keep you warm. Inserting instant heat pouches inside the back of gloves or in boots can help as well. If absolutely nothing else is available, then line the inside of your coat with newspaper as it simply another barrier against the cold and the wind and will help hold in heat.

Your outer layer should be rugged, but not necessarily heavy. It is your first line of defense against the cold and wind, but also against the pavement in case something goes wrong. Heavy-duty riding jackets made of leather work well for this. There are also many wonderful

textile jackets, with kevlar armor, that are also water-repellant in case you get caught out on the road and the skies open up with rain or snow. Make sure you cover any and all exposed skin.

Ultimately, you have to be aware of what your own body is telling you about being cold. If you are debating about whether you should pull off the road to warm up a while, you probably should. Hypothermia has a way of sneaking up on a person while impairing judgement and motor skills much in the same way alcohol use or drowsiness can.

Wrapping babies tightly in clothing is a great way to keep them warm, safe, and happy. Wrap yourself in loose fitting layers for riding and you will be warm, safe, and happy as well!

Merry Christmas to all....and "Hey! Let's be CAREFUL out there!"

By: Matt Thomason