

## February 2017 KHOG Safety Article - Food for Thought (AKA: The Motorcycle Popsicle)

One of my favorite things about riding someplace new is that there is always a need for me to sample local cuisine. I can always eat at the big franchise restaurants in my own hometown, though I rarely do. I don't want to dine on things that are thrown on a plate to make a corporate spreadsheet look good. I want foods that truly fit together and are the pride and joy of the local restaurateur. I usually look forward to those items, but sometimes it just doesn't work.

Several years ago, I flew to Moscow and walked around town for a few days taking in Red Square, the Kremlin, and the like. The first restaurant I tried had a menu that listed the "Chef Specials". I knew I had hit the jackpot! The first item, though, was "Ox testicles with potatoes". Highly disappointed, I instead opted for a cold tomato soup that evening.

A more recent discovery was something called "St. Louis Tacos". That caught my attention, as I had never heard of such a thing, so I had to read the description: "Three ground beef tacos topped with french fries and pico de gallo". I laughed a little too hard at the absurdity of that one and am pretty sure I offended my waitress in doing so. That combination just didn't sound natural, and honestly, it sounded like the beginnings of an internal international incident that I wanted to avoid!

Strange as it sounds, that seemingly bad combination made me think about motorcycle riding in cold weather....another combination that doesn't really seem that attractive. When there is snow and ice on the road, sure, that is clearly a bad idea. In an instant, a little sliding can turn into a disastrous face-plant. But there are days that the roads are clear that you can hear your bike calling to you from your garage, in fact, begging you to go out and get in the wind!

To some, the idea of being in the wind when the ambient temperature will freeze water just sounds like a whole lot of uncomfortable riding. To tell the truth though, if properly protected, winter riding can be an absolute joy and a welcome respite for cabin fever. People ride for many different reasons. Almost everyone agrees, though, that they do it because it is good for the soul. There is something about the wind that just blows out all the mental and emotional cobwebs and makes it easier to breathe again. The problem we need to protect against, though, is turning that stale brain fog into a deadly brain freeze!

Sunny days are great for riding. Many times in February, in our area, there will be sunny days in which the temperature will hover around 50°F, but there are just as many that top out at 20°F. Getting out on the road with 60 miles-an-hour of wind coming at you will make that temperature feel like -4°F against your body. That doesn't mean that you shouldn't go, but that kind of cold can do some damage in a hurry. Make sure to create a barrier against the wind as well as the cold!

Covering all exposed skin is a must. Granted, a shield of see-through plastic in your helmet does not do much to protect your face, but at least the shield is there to block the wind. Keep that visor down! We know gloves are important, but they can become quite bulky, making handlebar controls difficult to manage. Fortunately, there are good options of heated grips and heated gloves that can do the trick. They aren't inexpensive and can't block the wind, but they sure do beat a case of frostbite and can make a world of difference in your riding experience!

It is also hard to know how to bundle up without feeling you are the shape of the Michelin Man, being so insulated against the cold you can't move! A solid, sturdy, outer shell will always do the trick to protect against the wind. Leather is always a popular choice. There are all kinds of insulating material to put inside that shell to keep you warm. Wool, down, and various synthetics are great for that. Bulk is difficult to manage on a motorcycle, so always make sure you choose materials that are less bulky to provide a good range of motion.

The best bang for the buck is going to be heated clothing. It isn't cheap, but most have some sort of temperature control setting that allow for a wide range of conditions. The battery-powered stuff is very nice in its portability. I've even been known to wear my battery-powered vest to a hockey game! (Yeah, I'm that guy.) Keep the core of your body and your vital organs warm, and you'll survive through most anything until you can reach shelter and appropriate warmth.

We can't always prepare for when the cold will hit. In the past, I've been known to do things like buy a newspaper and line the inside of my clothes with it. The insulating quality isn't top-tier, but it helps block the wind, which really zaps away your heat. Trash bags work the same and can also be used over your torso to help fend off precipitation! Putting instant hand warmers against the back of your hands, inside your gloves can also be a really welcome treat. If you have room, they are great inside your boots as well! I have also been known to put gallon-sized Ziplock-type bags over my hands and in my boots to keep the wind away and help hold some heat in.

Do you have extra clothes with you? Wrapping a t-shirt around your neck will help hold in heat and protect it from the wind as well. That is an area that gets overlooked a lot. Blood to the brain flows through the neck. Don't allow yourself to become hypothermic because you didn't cover it up. Plus, a good bandana or neck covering will allow you to cover the lower part of your face to protect against breathing in excessively cold air. When the cold hits your lungs, that is when the coughing begins....and who likes coughing?

Finally, take breaks often to warm up and keep hydrated. Just because it isn't a hot day, doesn't mean that you aren't using up the water in your body. Don't believe me? Steam up the inside of your visor on a ride and see how the ice builds up! When talking about hydration, this means water. Warm drinks are good for warming your body temperature, but make sure you are taking in more water than caffeine. Caffeine can be a diuretic, potentially causing you use up more water than you are taking in with it. Also, alcohol serves absolutely no purpose in warming you up or keeping you hydrated. It should be avoided when riding.

When the roads are clear, riding in the winter can be a wonderful way to escape cabin fever, clear out your thoughts, and restore some peace to your soul. Always make sure to dress appropriately and use sound judgement in protecting yourself against the wind and the cold. I'll let you use your own judgement about "ground beef tacos topped with french fries and pico de gallo", though.

...and "Hey! Let's be CAREFUL out there!"

Matt Thomason  
Safety Officer

Kirkwood Harley Owners Group