

What does 28 degrees feel like? Or an entire ride that averages 32? We can tell you!



People ask two things. First, why would anyone ride when it's so cold. Second, how do you stay warm?

This has been a very unusual December. It's been many years, perhaps a couple decades, since I've seen 5 rides in a row with low temps in the upper-20s. This is not normal for this area! For some reason, the sun has decided to be a slacker; it shows up, but it doesn't do anything. If you stayed inside this December instead of riding in the colder-than-normal cold, you're forgiven. It's normal for many, maybe most, to go into hibernation mode at times like this.

Just not my group. If we wake up and there's no sign of the apocalypse, we ride. If there is a sign of the apocalypse but there's a chance we can out-run it on our bikes, we ride. If the apocalypse is upon us and electro-magnetic pulses have taken out everything electronic, so the choice is either run or ride, we ride. Of course, we'd need to leave our electric-shifting bikes behind, but that's not the worst of it... there'd be no Strava record for the ride! There's just no better way to get moving, mentally & physically, than getting out on a bike. It's what we do.

So we've gotten the first question out of the way. Now, how do we stay warm? Sometimes, we don't! Once in a while we misjudge the weather (or the shape we're in) and instead of thinking of the accomplishment, we might think how stupid we were. But, we'd never admit that. We will give no quarter to those who sit inside their warm houses, looking out to the frost and maybe even rain, drinking coffee from their Keurig coffee maker, and pondering how long they can delay before making that horribly-nasty dash from their front door to the car. And then crank the heater up past 11 before noticing they have to get back out and, the horror, scrape ice from their windshield. Yes, that's a tough life indeed.

But I haven't answered the question about staying warm on a bike when it's so cold. Why? Because there's a huge difference between warm and comfortable, and an even-larger gap between comfortable and possible. First, you have to convince yourself that it *is* possible. And once it's possible, everything else starts falling into place. You figure out what to wear. This morning it was-

- Bontrager wool socks
- Bontrager booties
- Pearl Izumi thermal tights
- Bontrager bib shorts
- Craft base layer
- Bontrager long-sleeve winter jersey
- Bontrager fleeced winter jacket
- Helmufs (ear warmers)
- Halo II headband
- Bontrager Storm Shell gloves

Once you have that figured out, the next task is to pace your ride appropriately. On the hilly rides we do, this is especially important because you don't want to work up a big sweat on a climb that is shortly followed by a higher-speed descent. In other words, really

cold days are a bad time to pay attention to Strava! On flatter sections, you need to maintain a very steady pace, balancing the amount of gas in the tank (how long you can go at that pace) against the need to generate enough heat to stay warm. One thing is certain; it's definitely helpful to be in decent shape. If you run out of gas, you're seriously in a very bad place, because there's nowhere to rest and get warm again.

At 28 degrees, your fingers and possibly your toes will feel cold. That's unavoidable. The biggest issue is to make sure your fingers don't get so cold they lose function. You depend on those fingers for both braking and shifting. Your toes, no big deal, that's simply a comfort issue. But you've got to have functional fingers to safely ride a bike. For the past several years, my fingers had become progressively less-functional in cold weather, as my Raynauds condition (a weird thing where your body decides to shut down blood flow to your fingers and toes as the temperature drops or there's a "trigger" even, which could be almost anything, typing for example) has become worse. Thankfully these past couple of weeks have demonstrated that medical science, in the form of PDE5 inhibitors, can work wonders for Raynauds! But for most, it's just a matter of keeping your hands warm & dry, as well as your core warm enough that your body doesn't try to protect itself by shutting down circulation to the extremities (which is a normal thing for a healthy person, if you simply get too cold).

Another thing to consider, anytime when it's below about 34 degrees, is that you could have ice on the road. In our area, it's extremely rare to have a combination of very cold & water at the same time, but this morning was one of the exceptions due to fog that had come in overnight. There's no way around it; you have to have a healthy respect for the possibility of ice. Fortunately, the only issue I had was climbing Kings, where I lost traction briefly in a couple of corners. Other than that, all good!

As for the ride report itself, it began with younger Kevin and Eric, picking up older (pilot) Kevin on the way up through the park. Pretty easy pace, for reasons described above (best excuse I have for going slow!). Older Kevin went a different way after climbing Kings, while the rest of us rode the usual loop. It remained very cold up on Skyline; the only time it felt like the sun wanted to even try to work was on the section of West Old LaHonda where you have the beautiful view of the ocean.

Descending 84 was interesting; both Eric and Kevin had a less concern about potential ice than I did. Kevin stayed glued to Eric's wheel while I was off the back a hundred meters or so, hoping I wasn't going to watch anyone slide out. No issues, and it did indeed feel really pleasant at the bottom, cruising along at a balmy 36 degrees.

I'm definitely looking forward to summer. --Mike--