

# Winter Cycling Clothing FAQ

by Sean Chisham

Get some thin wool socks. You might already have some. But thin wool socks are what I wear all winter. You don't want them too thick because if they make the shoe too tight then you restrict blood flow and the feet actually end up getting colder instead of warmer. Loose shoes for winter are always warmer. Many of the guys I ride with buy their winter shoes a size larger just for that reason.

Here are a few temperature ranges and what I would wear to be comfortable. Some ranges cross. That is because sometimes the temp ranges change on me such as riding into work in the morning then home in the afternoon. Or starting a ride at 0800 when the temps are 38 and ending the ride at 1100 when the temps are 55.

## **60-70**

Arm Warmers

Jersey

Knickers or Leg Warmers

## **50-65**

Arm Warmers

Jersey

Knickers or Leg Warmers

Vest

long finger thin glove or glove liners under summer fingerless gloves

toe covers

## **40-55**

Arm Warmers

Jersey

Knickers or leg warmers

Vest

lightly insulated windproof gloves

over ear skull cap up to 45F, above that a cycling cap

toe covers

wool socks

## **35-45**

Cycling Jacket

Jersey

Knickers or leg warmers

heavy insulated gloves maybe with glove liners added

over ear skull cap

full shoe covers or winter riding boots

wool socks

## **20-35**

Cycling Jacket

light polypro base layer or long sleeve jersey

Jersey

tights

balaclava or skull cap

heavy gloves maybe with glove liners added

winter riding boots

wool socks

sock liners perhaps

might carry chemical hand warmers with me in case my hands start to freeze, I rarely use them though.

Clothing is expensive to collect and took me a few years of collecting to come up with stuff that I like and works well for me. The upside is that the clothing should last for a LONG LONG time. I have had the same jacket for 4 or 5 years now and it is like new still. Shoe covers and gloves tend to wear out the fastest. I can get maybe 2-3 seasons out of each it seems. Jackets and vests never die on me.

The above temp ranges and clothing that I wear is like a jigsaw of layers. The key is layers. If you get too hot you can peel off a layer such as remove the vest or arm warmers. If you get too cold and are carrying the skull cap in your pocket you can put it on to warm up. In the winter time I almost always have a couple pieces of extra clothing with me in case I get too cold or hot. I can add clothing to warm up or swap a cooler piece for the warmer piece I am wearing to bring down my temp.

Of all the mix and matching above here are the basic components I used

**extremity:** arm warmers, leg warmers, knee warmers, tights, knickers

**hands:** thin long finger gloves (oversized), thicker gloves, glove liners

**head:** helmet liner, skull cap, balaclava, cycling cap

**feet:** toe covers, full shoe covers, wool socks, boots

**core/chest:** vest, jacket, jersey, thin polypro top

Of those items above here is the list of essentials in descending order of purchase importance to start the collection. these should cover a WIDE range of riding comfort all winter

### **essentials in descending order of purchase importance**

- wool socks
- thin windproof gloves (loose enough to allow glove liners to be added, I wear XXL if I can find them otherwise XL)
- thin and thick glove liners (these are cheap and turn 1 pair of gloves into 3 pairs by mixing and matching)
- thinly insulated windproof cycling jacket
- vest
- arm warmers, knee warmers
- shoe covers
- skull cap for under helmet or cycling cap
- tights

## next tier of shopping

- thin polypro base layer
- very thin balaclava (RARELY is a heavy balaclava practical around here)
- toe covers
- knickers

REI is a good place to purchase because their return policy is pretty much 100% satisfaction even if you wore the item a half dozen times and washed it. Many places, especially dedicated bike shops, will not take returns once they are worn or if the tags are removed. Performance Bike is an exception. They also have a liberal return policy.

When buying the jacket do NOT purchase a rainproof shell. I have a couple for rain and that is all they are good for. They do NOT breathe and I will sweat to death in them. Get a WINDPROOF breathable jacket. The more expensive ones have pit zips under the arms which is VERY nice to help control heat if I get too hot. But the jackets with added features like pit zips also tend to get much more expensive. I don't own one with pit zips yet but might buy one on clearance in the spring. We'll see.

If there is 1 word to remember when purchasing winter gear it is WINDPROOF. If it is windproof then it does not have to be heavy. Windproof it key.