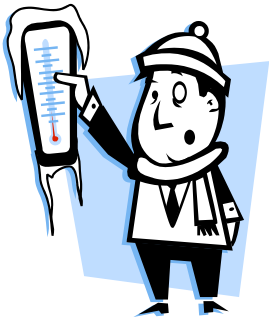
Cold Weather ATVing Tips

Personal Clothing And Equipment

Layering is the key to comfortable ATVing in cold weather. In a day, you may ride in a variety of conditions and environmental temperatures; layering lets you "tailor" your clothing for changing conditions. Easy riding along fast, open trails requires more clothing than slow, tight, technical trails that keep you working.



The first layer against your skin should be a synthetic or a cotton-polyester blend; i.e., 75% polyester or better, preferably of a "thermal weave" pattern. Wool underwear also works, and insulates even when wet. The second layer should be cotton, which will absorb perspiration moisture and hold it away from the skin. The synthetic fiber blend or wool underwear next to your skin "wicks away" moisture and acts as a dry insulating barrier from moisture/perspiration.

Layers after the first two may be insulating garments of your choice: fleece, down or fiber-filled wool, etc., depending on the outside temperature. Your outermost layer is a breathable rain suit, with zippered vents under the armpits that help prevent perspiration and moisture build-up. The rain suit blocks the wind and keeps you dry, even riding in rain or snow. Gore-Tex, a breathable, waterproof lamination, works well in this application; other products make similar claims.

Not to nag, but as already mentioned, the No. 1 key to survival in the winter is to stay dry. Since the greatest heat loss occurs at your extremities, they must be kept warm. For the head, you should wear a balaclava or similar type of face mask under your helmet, and of course goggles. The balaclava/face mask helps prevent frostbite, and goggles protect your eyes against the cold, not to mention from branches, flying ice and stones, etc.

Cold Weather Preparations

If you venture into remote areas during winter, never ride alone. For every winter trip, I go prepared to spend the night in the woods in case of emergency. A situation that would be inconvenient in the summer can quickly prove life-threatening in cold weather, and a survival kit is a necessity, not a luxury.

Preparing your ATV

Preparing my ride for the winter, I emphasize normal preventive maintenance, with a few cold-weather wrinkles:

- Inspect the frame, for cracks or damage.
- Clean and then grease electrical connections with dielectric grease.
- Clean, then grease chassis lube points.
- Replace all fluids with lubricants and coolants appropriate for expected temperatures.
- Lube control cables.

Cable lubrication helps avoid frozen, useless cables in the field. I reduce the air pressure in my tires to give me a wider footprint while riding in snow. And for added protection from cold winds, I install a windshield on my ATV.

While riding

Hit your brake levers occasionally to prevent them from freezing up. Check and clear snow and ice from your ride (mind the CV- and U-joints!) every time you take a break, and because its build-up reduces fuel economy; carry extra gas. Use your choke minimally; it's hard to keep a choke cable from freezing and sticking.

Avoid exposure and keep dry! Should you get wet, strip immediately and change into dry clothes. Hypo-

thermia, a silent killer, is far more deadly than hunger, claiming more victims than wild animals, avalanches and lightening. Hypothermia has three basic tools, usually acting together: cold, wind, and wetness. The high concentration of blood in your head makes it a major source of radiant heat loss. At 40 degrees, up to half of the body's heat can be lost through the head,

and at 5 degrees that jumps up to 75%, so always wear a warm hat when your helmet is off. The old maxim, "When your feet are cold, put on your hat," is all so true. Body heat is lost also through conduction, transmitting heat directly into a colder medium. Wet clothing conducts heat from several times to more than 200 times as fast as dry clothing. Convection—the transfer of heat by air in motion—is low when air movement isslight but rapidly increases with air speed. Radiant heat warms the air next to the skin, and heat loss via convection occurs if the air is constantly swept away by wind.

Effective winter clothing retains a layer of warmed air next to the skin. "Evaporation is another source of heat loss. When moisture evaporates from the skin, heat is lost—a physical process that cannot be effectively reduced. Moist air from sweating must be vented, reducing the possibility of damp clothing. Wet clothing loses heat by both conduction and evaporation. A final source of heat loss is respiration, from the warm, moist air exhaled. Heat loss via respiration can contribute to hypothermia. Minimizing heavy breathing through the nose rather than the mouth, will conserve body heat.

The key to success?

Dress in layers, stay dry and be prepared for the unexpected!

— Boise ATV Trail Riders, reprinted from 2003 Article from the All All-Terrain Vehicle Association