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Subject: [EXTERNAL]2013 Ready2Roll Cycling - Special Edition Note, Winter Wear

Before I get started, there are two special edition notes coming today, one this morning and one this evening. I want to alert you that the evening note is dedicated to one of the most effective safety opportunities available to all our riders. That is the Group Riding Skills class that has been developed by the League of American Bicyclists and the National MS Society. This class is designed to help new and experienced riders learn how to ride safely in group rides. There is a class room component to this three hour class followed by some on-bike exercises to teach you how to avoid hazards, safely stop very quick, make a quick emergency turn, etc.

This class is VERY highly recommended and the first one we are offering will be this Saturday afternoon at Katy Mills Mall in the afternoon after our ride. This is designed to give you time to ride, have lunch at the mall and attend the class in the afternoon. Watch for more details and sign-up info this evening. You really do want to attend this class - I did and learned several really useful riding techniques.

OK, It's time to share another Special Edition note.

This one has become an annual event just before we start the official training series. We have put a few really cold days behind us but we will probably have a few more cold days before it's time to ride to Austin so it's time for the 2013 version of my personal notes and experience riding in cold weather. I have to qualify this note - I am referring to Houston, Texas cold weather which may feel like a spring day for some of you coming in from out of town for the BP MS150. Never the less, when the temperature drops, it's very useful to have a plan of attack to stay warm so you can enjoy the ride.

So, here we go - this version is not drastically different from my thoughts last year but I did learn a LOT at a ride two years ago about one area I had not paid much attention to so there are some new tidbits here...

2013 Winter Wear

Several years ago, I pointed out a significant life milestone that had occurred - **I hit the big five-oh**. That is to say, I was working in my closet and counted 50 cycling jerseys! Of course, when I reported this milestone to my wife, she promptly made me move many of the jerseys into another closet so we would have more room! This led me to consider (and reorganize) all my cycling clothes which led to a trip to Target to get some of those stacking plastic drawers and eventually, to this long note about how to dress for riding in cold weather.

I have updated this note for 2013 - I have accumulated quite a bit of cycling clothing over 18 years and to be honest, some of the cold weather stuff gets worn 0-2 times a year so it lasts a LONG time. Each year, I do add a few articles to the mix so I have changed some of my favorites and recommendations. So go find a warm/cozy spot and read on...

Today's topic answers a question several new riders asked me. **"I'm a new rider, what should I get to help stay warm when it's cold outside?"** (Disclaimer - The rest of this note is all based on personal experience. There is no scientific method or any method to my madness - just sharing what has worked for me...)

First of all, what you DON'T want to do is get a pillow to throw over your alarm clock on cold mornings!

So, how do you cope with the cool weather? The key concept is to dress in light to medium layers. In Houston's mild climate 2-3 layers is the most you should ever need as long as you learn your comfort level and keep a few favorite good cold weather clothes handy.

Layering has several benefits - You can use lightweight layers so your clothing is not heavy - 2-3 layers plus the air in between makes a very effective insulation system. Another key benefit - you can fine tune your layers as you warm up and roll up a layer and put it in your back pocket.

One related cold weather rule - if you are comfortable when we start, you WILL overheat unless you have layers you can unzip and/or stop and shed as you warm up.

I'm going to break this down into vertical groupings from toe to head but first, I'm going to mention the items that I have gotten the most use out of - my "Top 3". Those of you with short attention spans can quit after this and go stock up...

1 - **Gore Windstopper Jacket (& Shell)**

This has been my favorite, most used, cool weather item - I started with a Windstopper running shell I found at the Marathon Expo many years ago. Windstopper fabric is a lot more reasonably priced than full Gore-Tex, breathes as well and is said to be slightly less waterproof but I can't tell the difference on rainy rides. A couple of years ago, I got a second cycling specific Gore Windstopper jacket and it has displaced the shell as my top pick. It is more fitted and has long sleeves that can zip off so it is very flexible for riding and doesn't flap in the wind. On the other hand, the new jacket is gray and black which clearly doesn't match much whereas the reliable old shell is purple and we all know that purple goes w/ just about anything...at least in my closet...

The Windstopper tops keep me warm but don't let me get too hot (they breathe and unzip). I can't say enough good things about Gore fabric technology - they really work as promised - keep the wind and water out, keep you warm, but allow your perspiration to escape so you stay comfortable.

You can find these locally (i.e. in Sun & Ski Sports this Saturday!) - it's worth trying on to confirm the fit - bring your proposed inner layers to test the entire combination. My purple shell is a running shell and it came from the marathon expo many years ago. The new Gore jacket came from a bike shop. Both are excellent - very highly rated for the wind/waterproof aspects and great comfort level - cold, wet or both!

2013 Update - I now have a 3rd Windstopper outer layer - another Gore bike jacket which I added during the winter closeout sales - the weight falls between the other two so I can really fine tune for the weather

2 - **Smart Wool "Base layer" long sleeve top**

Remember the layering concept - the base layer is as critical as the outer layer This can be worn under a shell or under a jersey. It is definitely worth the modest additional investment to get a good fabric here - it wicks your body moisture away - Stays warm and relatively dry against your skin. I'm not a fabric expert, I try these on - this is an item you want to try on to see what feels good to you. I do have a long sleeve wool jersey I got by mail and it is scratchy against my skin so I rarely wear it. I learned it's important to try on the base layer before buying.

For many years, I wore the high tech fabric base layers and still like them but a few years ago, Marc Davis, 1/2 of the sometimes famous Davis Brothers, told me about the Smart Wool shirt he had to get in Oregon when the ride temps were so cold. I had tried a plain wool base jersey (see above) but it was too itchy to me. The Smart Wool, on the other hand is WONDERFUL! The company uses a very fine fiber and does some magic because it is not scratchy, keeps you warm, wicks perspiration pretty effectively, doesn't overheat, and doesn't develop odors - this can happen with some of the tech fabrics.

In recent years, we have had some cool days (with a headwind) as we headed off to Austin on Sunday. My Smart Wool top under a jersey was perfect. It was smart enough to keep me warm in the early morning but also smart

enough to keep me comfortable as the day warmed up. I wore it all the way to the last rest stop and slipped it in a back pocket for the final stretch.

My Smartwool base is the first layer that goes on when it's cool enough for layers. When combined with a good shell and long or short sleeve jersey for the middle layer, you can handle almost any Houston weather.

You may need to look around to find the Smart Wool items but it's worth the search!

2013 Smartwool Update - One of my oldest base layers and my fairly new pair of Smartwool liner gloves have started to develop a few holes. I'm going to see if this is a defect or if the really soft fibers do wear out sooner than the traditional wool but I still love my Smartwool...

3 - Good pair of full finger gloves

There are many styles so, if possible, head to the local bike shops to look and try several on. This is a cycling specialty item (I've never found good cycling gloves at the Marathon Expo) My most used pair has a Gore liner (waterproof, & breathe) and big "cuffs" that can fit over the sleeves on my jacket. I also have a pair of funky "convertible" gloves that have a full thumb and open fingers. They also have a mitten-like cover that can go over all four fingers or fold back so your fingers are exposed when the day warms up. I usually combine these with a pair of light weight liners for really cold days.

I always keep these in my bike bag until the weather warms up (March) but I only wear them if it's 40 or below or cool and possibility of rain. Cool hands don't bother me but cold & wet is not fun!

Bonus Tip...

Here's another cold weather tip that is VERY timely this week. I noted that it's hard to find good cold weather gloves at the marathon expo. On the other hand, there is a sporting activity that involves weather way colder than most of the weather we ride in. That, of course, would be skiing. There are many great cold weather gloves for skiing. I have found the "lobster" style with a thumb and two "claws" for two fingers each to be usable to riding, braking and shifting in really cold weather. There is a bonus tip here. Our ride this week starts at Sun & **Ski** Sports. They will be opening for us at 6:00 am so come by before the ride when the temp may be in the upper 30's or after the ride (upper 40's to low 50's) and check out the cold weather cycling gear and walk into the next section to check out the skiing gloves and other base layers...

OK, that's my "Top 3" and I'm sticking to it! Note that all these are upper body items. I'm not an expert but suspect that's because your legs stay warmer from the constant pedaling effort. If you ride at a more casual pace, you may want some leg protection in your top 3 - there is not a right/wrong answer here.

Now, more musings about the various components starting from the bottom up...

Feet

My feet seem less sensitive to getting cold than some of you but I do have a few items which I do appreciate for really cold rides:

- Wool socks - Definitely worth buying at least one pair, they do stay warm and dry. Of course, I have gradually added several weights of Smart Wool socks to my wardrobe and again, they are the most used but my feet don't notice the wool itch as much as my upper body did so any form of wool helps keep your feet warm.

- Insulated "Toasties" - This is a small insulated cover that slips over the front half of your shoe. They are MUCH easier to get on/off than the full boots and keep my feet very cozy unless it's really wet. These plus Smartwool socks covers 95+% of my cool ride needs.

- Full cover insulated boots - If it's really cold and wet, these make the ride a LOT more pleasant - I rarely use mine but have a pair just in case - I was on the infamous New Ulm ride where we ran into rain and temp dropping into the 40's about 15 miles out and my feet would have been real cozy if I had owned these at the time. I do own them now and bring if it may be really cold or cool & wet.

Legs

For many years, I just put a pair of my running tights on over my cycling shorts and that worked fine. The benefits were less cost, lighter weight and many colors to choose from. Five years ago, I finally broke down and got a pair of insulated, full length biking tights with a chamois liner. I wore them for the first time on a 38 degree day rising to low 50's. I really enjoyed them and I never noticed my legs being cold early or warm later in the ride. My legs tend

to stay warm since you use them so heavily to ride so this is still fairly low on my priority list but worth a small splurge if you have all the other layers covered. After our cold wet New Ulm ride, I also have a 2nd pair with a waterproof lining in the front only. They are quite effective in keeping your legs warm & dry on a cold/wet day.

Other leggings in my drawer

: - Leg warmers - these extend from the knees to your ankles and are worn on cool days with shorts and usually removed after it warms up. I very rarely use these - if it's cold, I prefer full tights - you may like this option for cool, but warming weather

- Waterproof leg covers (wear over tights) I've had these for 5 years and never worn them. They were on sale and maybe if I commute more in the winter they would come in handy.

Upper Body

As you can tell, I've collected quite a few base layer tops over the years and these have got a LOT of miles on them. My base layer tops vary from pretty light to fairly heavy and I select based on the temperature, top layer and color (on milder days when this layer will be exposed). I have never needed more than three layers in the Houston weather.

Other items I've added fairly recently

- Light, water resistant shell - You've probably seen these, many are very bright yellow (mine is). They are quite good to have on mild days as they can easily fit in a back pocket as you warm up. Ideal for cool, but not cold days

2013 Update - I found a pair of the Nike running shoes I use in the same electric yellow color to match my shell. I can't ride in them but it's useful to be stylin' before and after the rides as well. Many of you could not miss the shoes in Hempstead last Saturday...

Arms/Hands

First my arms. I have many pairs of light to medium weight arm warmers. I use these when it's sunny and the temps are in the low 50's at the start. They keep your arms warm but give you the flexibility to slip them off as the day warms up. A few years ago, I broke down and started adding more pairs of color coordinated arm warmers to my collection to coordinate with a various short sleeve jerseys. These are mostly an end of the season deal (\$5/pair) or custom made to match our recent team jerseys - when your bike has been painted to match one of your favorite jerseys, you do have a standard to maintain...

As for my hands, I have three scenarios:

- Normal - 50 degrees and up - normal open finger bike gloves
- Cool - 40's - Light finger gloves w/ bike gloves over. The inner gloves usually come off at a rest stop
- Cold - 30's or cooler - My Gore lined gloves or my convertible gloves/mittens as noted in my Top 3 above.

I have an old pair of really old Gore-Tex mittens that I will wear over my gloves before the ride if it's really cold. These are not good for riding but the Gore-Tex mitten keeps my hands quite toasty until I need to slip them off to ride and they are very small/light so they easily fit into a back pocket.

Head

Up until 2011, I wrote that I had some face covers but due to the dork factor, I never wore them. Then, on ride 2 of our 2011 season, we headed out and made an immediate turn to the north into a very stiff wind and 34 degrees. All my great clothes worked great and I was comfortable, just about everywhere...

...except my cheeks and jaw and they were SO cold that all of me felt miserable - warm & miserable!

When we got the to rest stop, I actually had to wait for my jaw to warm up a bit to eat some snacks - I can never recall my face feeling so miserable.

So now, I have a great lower face wrap that one of our very thoughtful riders sent me and a Smartwool balaclava (or is it baklava?). I learned my lesson and I won't be as hesitant to put one of these on if we face the prospect of riding into a stiff wind on a really cold day.

As for the top of my head - I have to confess that there's not much there so I do need a head cover on cooler rides. I put on my head cover if it's 45 or below. I have a fairly light head cover for cool days and a heavier, stretchy cover incl ears. The heavier cover makes it harder to hear and I like to talk and listen when we ride so I only pull it out below 35 degrees - when there are usually not too many riders out. I did buy a medium weight Smartwool head cover in the off season, I'll try it if we have a cold ride day this year.

Bike Bag

No, I don't wear my bike bag but this has become an incredibly useful part of my equipment and makes it very

easy to make sure I have the right stuff at the right place at the right time. I looked around and got a cycling bag with a LOT of pockets/compartments including mesh shoe pockets on one end, a helmet compartment, a BIG main compartment another mid-size compartment and several side pockets plus holders for two water bottles. I keep my helmet, shoes, cheap backup sunglasses, gloves, towels, spare change, dollar bills, gels and energy bars and other basics in the bag 24/7 and swap out the clothes weekly and keep some seasonal backups such as the previously mentioned full shoe covers, etc. It's a BIG bag but when I get to the ride, I have everything I need and some spares for someone (sometimes me!) who forgot something. This is not on the top of your winter wear list but once you have the basics covered and you get bit by the cycling bug, a good cycling bag will make your life much easier...

OK, one more tip from the other side of the coin - for keeping cool...

Most of the year, it's fairly warm in Houston so I freeze my drinks (in insulated water bottles) overnight before the ride. I freeze a full bottle of sport drink and a half bottle* of water. I top off the water bottle from the tap before I leave and the water is cold but melted enough to drink as we get going and the sport drink is ready to drink and usually still a little slushy when the water runs out. But that's NOT the only tip here.. The extra bonus tip is that I put the tops to the water bottles on top of my car keys and next to the door from the kitchen to the garage. This way, I can't forget to get the water bottles and put them in the bottle holders in my bike bag before I head out the door. There you go - two great tips in one!-)

I do have a lot of things stuffed in my cold weather drawer. Start with the basics and build your collection over several years. Do visit the local bike shops - now for the essentials and later when the winter gear is on sale. Our coldest (wet) ride in recent years occurred in April so take advantage of the end of winter prices to expand your wardrobe foundation at good prices...

If you are training up north, here is a related article with more specific items. Note that it's written by a rider in Minnesota so it's focused on REAL cold weather. <http://www.startribune.com/lifestyle/12962872.html>

There is also some good info on the Active.com site right now. Here are the links:

<http://www.active.com/cycling/Articles/Why-I-Bike-in-Really-Cold-Weather--And-How-You-Can-Too.htm>

And...

http://www.active.com/cycling/Articles/Winterize_your_cycling_wardrobe_to_enjoy_rides_in_the_cold.htm

OK, I have exhausted the topic so I better quit here at page 2 (or 3?).

Be safe, stay warm and have fun getting ready to roll...

Happy riding!

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