

# Cool Weather Clothing

By Maury Brown

For the purposes of this discussion, I will define "cool weather" as 40 to 65 degrees. At temperatures above 65 degrees, most riders will be comfortable in shorts and a jersey. Below 40 degrees, additional cold weather apparel becomes necessary. I'll discuss cold weather riding next month. The recommendations I give of what to wear in specific conditions are intended to be starting points and guidelines. While some individuals will be wearing tights and toe covers at 55 degrees, others may still be comfortable in shorts. Practice and experience will determine what works for you in various conditions.

One of the first cool weather items a cyclist should invest in is a pair of tights. Tights come in different weights, but the thinnest are usually adequate down to about 45 degrees. Tights are available padded or unpadded. I like unpadded ones; I like to get extra miles out of old cycling shorts by wearing them under my tights. Tights can be rolled up and stuffed in a jersey pocket. Other leg warming items to consider include knickers (padded cycling shorts that extend to below the knees), leg warmers, and knee warmers. Knickers are nice for temperatures in the 50's, but they lack the flexibility of knee or leg warmers or tights. Knee and leg warmers are ideal for rides where temperature change is expected, as they can be donned or stripped as necessary and rolled up very small and stuffed in a pocket. I sometimes combine knee warmers with tights (perfect for temperatures in the lower 40's) and then strip as the temperature rises.

One of my favorite and most often used cool weather riding items are arm warmers. Arm warmers can be combined with a summer weight jersey for riding comfort in the mid to low 60's. They work well with a heavier jersey or a sleeveless shell in temperatures down to 40 degrees. Like knee warmers, arm warmers can be easily put on or removed during a ride, and stuffed in a pocket. Arm warmers can even be pulled down to the wrists while riding, if you are over-heating while climbing a hill, for example.

Long sleeve jerseys are necessary for very cool temperatures, but in temperatures over 45 degrees, I prefer the flexibility of arm warmers. Jersey sleeves are not easy to roll up and a jersey takes up a lot of pocket space. When the temperature dips below about 60 degrees, however, a summer weight jersey will be inadequate for keeping your torso warm enough. Legs and arms will usually be OK with one layer in the 50's and upper 40's, if your torso is warm. If your torso isn't being kept warm enough (at any temperature) you risk getting seriously cold.

I like wool jerseys. Wool is a natural material, it wears well, it's no more difficult to clean than synthetic jerseys, and it looks nice. I often wear it right next to my skin. I didn't for years because I assumed it would be too scratchy. Actually after wearing it next to my skin a couple of times, I didn't even notice the scratchiness any more. While most people wouldn't think of wearing a synthetic jersey twice without laundering it, a wool jersey will usually have no odor whatsoever after a ride. I commonly wear my wool jerseys (next to my skin) two or three times between washings. A short sleeve wool jersey and a pair of arm warmers are perfect from about 65 down to 50 degrees.

At temperatures below about 50degrees, most riders will want some kind of shell to protect their torso from the cold wind. I find that a sleeveless shell over a wool or mid weight synthetic jersey, (either long sleeve, or short sleeve with arm warmers), works well when riding in the 40's. The best shells for these temperatures have vents or a mesh back. I would not suggest using an unventilated long-sleeve shell in temperatures over 35 degrees or so. While they are very effective at keeping the heat in, they also keep moisture in. You can overheat and sweat very quickly. Sleeveless shells, too, can be easily rolled up and put in a jersey pocket. An effective trick, when you just need a little wind protection on the front of your torso, is to put a thin section of newspaper under your jersey. While not the most refined or comfortable solution, it works! The newspaper is disposable and perfect for the first part of an early morning ride, as the temperatures are rising. If you get caught out in falling temperatures with inadequate clothing, a newspaper or grocery bag under your jersey can save the day.

When riding in temperatures below about 55 degrees, you will need full fingered gloves. I have a thin pair for temperatures in the 50's, and a warmer pair for temperatures below 45, and a still warmer pair for cold weather. On long rides with anticipated temperature change, I will sometimes carry a second pair of gloves in my pocket.

Toe covers can be stretched over the toes of cycling shoes to protect feet from the wind. I find them helpful in temperatures below 45 degrees. These too, can be easily put on or removed during a ride.

Ideally, cyclists will have a variety of cool weather clothing items at their disposal. Start with a pair of tights, full-fingered gloves, arm warmers, and sometimes a newspaper, and you will be ready to significantly extend your riding season into the spring and fall. When purchasing jerseys and shells, be sure and consider visible colors for riding in low light conditions.