

# How To

## NEITHER RAIN, NOR SLEET: WHEN ROAD CONDITIONS STINK, FOLLOW THESE FIVE RULES TO ROLL THROUGH YOUR RIDE UNSCATHED

By: Brian Fiske

Early-spring roads and weather aren't always cycling friendly. That doesn't mean you should sit on the sidelines. After all, if you want to boost your performance, putting some miles in now can give you a jump-start on the rest of the season. With these spring-ride basics, you can turn any early-season outing into an enjoyable, fitness-boosting spin.

**USE COMMON SENSE:** If a storm recently spread a quarter-inch of ice on the roads, put the bike back on the trainer until conditions improve. Obvious advice, we know. We also know that most cyclists have at some point, despite knowing better, found themselves on dangerously slick roads asking, "What was I thinking?"

**GET KNOBBY:** Slap cyclocross tires on your road bike in the early season for extra traction and additional protection against punctures. The added rolling resistance means you'll go slower for a given effort, which in turn cuts down on your self-made windchill and makes you less likely to careen into obstacles or debris patches in your path. Plus, when you switch back to your regular tires you'll feel like a superhero.

**DON'T BE A JERK:** Sudden movements, such as grabbing a handful of brake or being aggressive in corners, especially in iffy conditions, will surely land you on your butt. Instead, stay centered on the bike and look far enough ahead that you have plenty of time to slow down for corners or react to slick patches. If you do encounter sand or ice, level your pedals, point your bike straight ahead, relax your upper body, and exhale as you cross. If you have to pedal over a larger patch, keep your stroke extra smooth with steady, even pressure on the pedals — no quick stabs.

**DEHUMIDIFY YOURSELF:** Nothing sucks the life out of a ride more than being wet and cold. The right clothing varies with the temperature, but, in a nutshell, you want a base layer that wicks moisture away from your skin (crucial, as the chill from sweat often sneaks up on you so you're cold before you can react to it), a midlayer for insulation, and a shell with a windproof front to block the breeze. Layers should be easy to shed so you can stash them in a pocket. On your lower body, windproof crotch and knee panels are essential when weather is truly foul.

**MIND YOUR MACHINE:** Mix road salt and grit with a little water and you get a crunchy solution that chews through bike parts faster than a seven-year-old can gorge on his Easter basket haul. To minimize damage, clean and lube your chain after every ride. Remember the last step in the clean-and-lube: thoroughly wipe down the chain. Clean any stuck-in gunk from the chainrings, cassette and pedal bodies, as well as any exposed cables. Then, check your brake pads: Grit can become trapped on and in them and grind down your rims when you brake. Even if you use a spare set of wheels as your beater hoops, you can save them from an early demise by inspecting your brake pads frequently and replacing them if they're full of embedded grit (you can pick out smaller amounts) or if they're approaching the wear-indicator mark.