

Stayin' alive

There's some basic rules to follow when riding in severe heat. Simon Thomas takes a look at the do's and do not do's of riding in the heat.

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Main Keep your gear on but get into the shade. The cooler air will gradually lower your body temperature without excessively dehydrating you.

Inset right Putting a water-soaked bandanna or headscarf on will chill the arteries around your neck that send blood to the brain, helping to keep brain tissue cooler.



Keep geared up

It's a normal reaction when it's hot to want to strip off and wear as little as possible. However, exposing your skin to air that's hotter than you are will only increase your body temperature, dehydrate you and make you feel worse.

The best way to keep from getting cooked is to keep your kit on. Your clothing will insulate your body from the hot air surrounding it. It's important to keep your perspiring skin in the shade. Riding in a t-shirt will mean that with the combination of the sun and the hot air whipping over you, the cooling layer of perspiration on your skin will evaporate faster than your body can produce it.

Sounds crazy right? When you are wearing a T-shirt or riding with exposed skin in hot temps, you're going to reach a point of severe dehydration far sooner, as you body battles to effectively perspire enough to keep up with what's being whipped off your skin. Keeping your riding gear on is more about making the best of a shitty scenario and dealing with the compromise of trying to maintain a manageable body temperature in relation to staving off chronic dehydration where you'll lose your faculties and end up in shit creek. We're not saying you'll be cooler keeping your kit on but you're able to more effectively manage your body's limited resources.



So, dependent on the air temp in a T-shirt, you might be cooler for a while, but it's kind of like running your engine in the rpm red zone for prolonged periods – the engine will cope but it'll burn out that much faster. Riding in high temps is about maintaining a balance over the long haul, not just staying cool in the short term.

Buy a light coloured riding suit; it will reflect the heat. Dark colours absorb heat and become hot.

Keep your boots on! Yeah, cowboy jokes aside, the sun, the ground and your engine all heat up your feet! Hot swollen feet make riding miserable.

Keep your helmet on. Apart from the obvious safety benefits of this piece of advice, helmets also provide more insulation against hot air and protect your head from the sun's rays.

If you have it to spare, pour water on yourself and soak a bandana or scarf with water and tie it around your neck. As the water evaporates it will cool down the skin. More importantly the cooling bandana/scarf also micro chills the blood passing through the carotid artery in your neck on it's way to your brain. In super hot temps keeping your brain tissue cool is key.

Note: If you are riding in an area with both high temperatures and high humidity, wetting your clothing is less effective as the high



Above Water-cooled on the right, air-cooled on the left. Both have their pros and cons...

moisture levels in the air mean that evaporation takes longer. Between that and the fact that you're sweating your arse off, it's unlikely that the evaporation technique is going to be an efficient way to control your body temperature.

Check out the new cooling vest's that are on the market. They all work using the same evaporative principles as the wetted neck scarf technique above. Hot air causes the water in the vest to evaporate and in turn draws heat away from the body. Remember for this to work you need to have good ventilation so mesh jackets are a good bet or a jacket with plenty of venting.

Don't ride in cotton T-shirts. Base layers aren't just for wannabe mountaineers. Grab yourself a synthetic base layer (like Skins, etc), which will wick moisture easily and will increase the cooling effect. A cotton T-shirt acts like a sponge, holding dampness. The heavy wet cotton can also cause sore points on your skin. If that's not reason enough to ditch the cotton, think on this; at the end of a long hot day, wearing a t-shirt drenched in your funky man sweat, you're probably going to stink. Hey, just saying!

H2O – Stay Hydrated

Mild dehydration starts when a person has lost just two percent of their total fluid. The signs are easy to recognise – thirst, loss of appetite, dry mouth and headaches. If you loose more than five percent, riding your motorcycle is going to get challenging.

Before you set off for a long ride in the heat, drink a lot of water. Hydration should start 24 hours before. Drink your water while you ride. Use a wearable hydration system, which allows you to drink whilst on the go.

Carry on drinking water when you get off your bike: it can take up to two hours to fully rehydrate. Try to avoid cold water and ice, which can shock your system, making it harder for your body to absorb. Room temperature water is your best option.

If you're suffering from signs of severe dehydration, (cramps, nausea, loss of balance, etc) mix 1/2 teaspoon of table salt to a half glass of water and drink one every 15 minutes. Sure, it tastes foul but works fast. Trust me, this one works.

Time to ride

The hours from 4:00am to 7:00am are the day's coolest. It's best to cover as many miles as possible during these hours, however in Australia that means dicing with wildlife like roos and emus in the desert, as this and dusk are their most active times, so it's up to you as to how much risk is acceptable.

Make the day's ride shorter than normal as riding in extreme heat reduces your overall ability. The more fluid you loose the higher your chance of issues. In higher temperatures a ride or route that would normally be 'easy' can become challenging.

Adjust your route by trying to take a route into higher elevations where it's cooler. Only venture into a desert in the early hours and avoid the heat of the day but if it's unavoidable take something to make your own shade. The other option is to ride at night. We always try to avoid night riding but sometimes it's the only practical solution.

Air-Cooled Vs Water-Cooled

There are pros and cons to both and no 'one-bike fits all' solution. Air-cooled bikes have been known to seize in extreme temperatures. They typically run much hotter at very slow speeds or stuck at a standstill in traffic.

On the upside, air-cooled machines are much simpler as there's no need for cooling water channels, a radiator, water pump, hoses etc. As long as you can get moving modern air-cooled motors cool pretty quickly.

Water-cooled bikes can regulate their engine temps more rapidly and have an advantage when you're forced to ride slowly in hot weather, but certain bike models can have the rider roasting as their fan blasts hot air across the rider's legs.

Water-cooled motors also require more maintenance. Before heading out into any high temperature area, especially if it's remote, check water levels and antifreeze and inspect your radiator for any damage. One stick or flying rock through the radiator can leave you stranded. There are more parts that can break or fail i.e. water pump, hoses, radiator, thermostat and fan.



Left Drink more water! Buy a drink backpack. Use it. It could save your life – seriously.

Right Sunrise/sunset is the most dangerous time to ride in Australia in terms of wildlife, but it's the best for cooler riding conditions. Ride smart and don't take unacceptable risks.



HOT DESERT GUIDE

Some of the hottest deserts we've explored.

As deserts cover more than one fifth of our planet, and are found on every continent, it's not surprising that we have ridden a few during our 11-years on the road. Here are some of the hottest deserts we have ridden through:

SAHARA

Despite the fact that we were there in winter the daytime temps were well over 50°C and dropped to near freezing overnight.

The Sahara is huge, covering a territory roughly equivalent to the United States. The Sahara crosses around 20 lines of longitude and encompasses at least 10 countries – Morocco, Mauritania, Mali, Algeria, Libya, Niger, Tunisia, Chad, Egypt and Sudan – and the disputed territory of Western Sahara. It covers about 1/4 of the African continent.

Travel in the Sahara is best between October and April or early May when daytime temperatures are generally bearable. In the depths of the Saharan winter (especially December and January), night-time temperatures can fall below freezing. Sand storms are possible from January through May. No one in their right mind would venture into this desert from June to early September.

We took the shortest route possible, which included the beach crossing, to reach the Mauritanian Capital of Nouakchott. It took us four 12-hour riding days.

Note: We did this route before the road had been built between Nouadhibou and Nouakchott. This new highway was completed in 2005.



THE GREAT VICTORIA (Australia)

The Great Victoria is the largest Australian desert and is said to be the third largest desert in the world, after the Sahara and the Arabian Desert. Other deserts mainly surround it! The days in summer are hot, anything between 30 and 40°C (90 – 105F) but at least this is a dry heat. Winter temps are more comfortable 20-25°C .



THE KALAHARI

The Kalahari covers a huge area in South Africa extending 900,000 square kilometres (350,000 sq mi), covering much of Botswana and parts of Namibia and South Africa. It has a cooler climate than the Sahara as its altitude ranges from 600 to 1600 meters. It can even experience frost from June to August! Kalahari can occasionally reach daily temperatures close to 45°C (113°F).

The seasons of the Kalahari consist of very dry and cold winters, (April to October) and very hot, wet and green summers (November to March).

DESERT GUIDE – The List of deserts we have ridden through:

- Kalahari (ZA)
- Namib (ZA)
- Sahara (Africa)
- Gobi (Mongolia)
- Karakum (Turkmenistan)
- Kyzyl Kum (Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan)
- The Great Thar (India/Pakistan)
- Atacama (Chile/Peru)
- La Guajira (northern Colombia/Venezuela)
- Monte (Argentina)
- Patagonian (Argentina/Chile)
- Sechura (Nazca) Peru
- Chichuahuan (north Mexico)
- Colorado (part of Sonoran desert)
- Great Basin (US largest)
- Savador Dali (Bolivia)
- Salar de Uyuni (Bolivian salt desert)
- Great Karoo Desert (South Africa)
- Little Karoo deserts (South Africa)
- Mojave (US)
- Sonoran (US)
- The Great Victoria (Australia)
- The Great Sandy (Australia)
- The Simpson (Australia)
- Nullarbor Desert (Australia)
- Rangipo ■



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