

PRO RIDER

# HEAT OF THE MOMENT

Words: Mark Jones/Pro Rider

**A woman who my mother knows, came in and took off all her clothes.  
Said I, not being very old, 'By golly gosh, you must be cold!'  
'No, no!' she cried. 'Indeed, I'm not! I'm feeling devilishly hot!'**



**R**onald Dahl's fame must come from stories of guys like James with his giant fruit and Charley tripping through a chocolate factory as he didn't put a lot of effort into his 'Hot and Cold' poem! It does give a sense of how we can perceive temperature change rather differently though.

A while back, Cornell University studied the effect of cooling in a work environment. With a temperature around a not exactly chilly 20°C, employees made 44% more errors and were half as productive than when at a toasty 25. The research found when folks were colder, they were distracted and inefficient. So what, you may ask? But when our body temperature drops, we use more energy to keep warm, rather than put it to better use in concentrating and being inspired. In motorcycling terms, we become less involved in looking for hazards and working out ways of dealing with them.

So, let's consider a nice summer ride between two places with nearly all the same letters in their names – Tauranga and Turangi – a 200km half-day jaunt with a coffee stop and a bit of lunch in Taupo on the way. Dragging ourselves out of bed it's still a bit chilly (Tauranga by the sea can have a summer day starting below 15 degrees) so we wrap up for the stroll to coffee and breakfast. As we're on our hols, it's 11 am when we get going and already 23 degrees – zip-out thermal lining well and truly stuffed away. As the sulphurous odour

of Rotovegus sneaks into nostrils, we stop for another coffee – the noticeable two-degree drop isn't so bad, and with a warm drink on board, off we go again. Turangi comes up in around 40 mins, and all that coffee now requires a bladder break! Still, a respectable 21 but our passenger thinks Mt Ruapehu looks lovely and pleads for a closer look. Umm, the ride there and back will be a little under an hour, so why not, but we better get a move on. The Desert Road is clear of camper vans and the throttle hand has a tempting twitch, or is that a reaction to the temperature dropping five degrees in under half an hour? OK, seen the snow, bugger this and let's head back.

What our wee ride is showing us here is the effect of the so-called 'lapse rate'. For every 1000 metres we climb, 6.5°C is lopped off the temperature. Not such a big deal with a two-degree drop from starting in Tauranga and going through our next couple of stops, but significant as we head across the Tongariro National Park. If it were July, wind chill would be factored in and make it seem even nippier along our route, but because it was mid-winter, we would have all the right gear on. Leaving a balmy coastal resort had us in summer attire, and the hasty deviation in route up to the mountain without adding a layer sure got our attention, or actually took it away!

Psychologists have also recently discovered that experiencing a temperature drop can have a lot to do with how we interact with others. When we get colder, we perceive others as

behaving coldly and in a less open manner. So, the pillion who is now whingeing gets short shrift and that texting tourist driving up ahead is a real wind up. Conversely, physical warmth leads to emotional warmth and trust, but if we get too hot concentration goes out of the window again. Too warm an environment can make us lethargic and unfocused. Heat stress causes the body to lose electrolytes and water faster (made worse by those coffees), causing low mental performance and decreased motor skills. Your body will try to preserve energy, slowing reaction times and making the task of riding error-free a difficult feat.

The message here is that no matter whether it is summer or winter, or somewhere in between – with our maritime climate this can happen on the same day here in NZ – we need to have the right gear with us to moderate whatever temperature we encounter. This is particularly important in summer when it is easy to be lulled into a false sense of security by the sun's rays as we set off only to have a chilly lapse in concentration as the ride goes on, especially if touring up through the mountains. At the other end of the spectrum, with global warming kicking in, be ready to cool down having chosen gear with opening vents as well as removable lining, and perhaps even resort to the likes of evaporative cooling vests if things really do get so devilishly hot. Forget James and his Peach and Charley and his chocolate. Goldilocks had it sorted - not too hot and not too cold, just right! ■■■

**“For every 1000 metres we climb, 6.5°C is lopped off the temperature.”**



**Sunny at the bottom, cold at the top...**

