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What to Wear for Snowmobiling

Snowmobiling has become one of today's most popular recreational pursuits, but there is nothing more miserable or dangerous than snowmobiling without proper clothing. To really enjoy this sport you must feel comfortable and at ease in clothes that keep you warm and dry, yet allow you freedom to move. They must not block your visibility, irritate you, or be a safety hazard.

The wind chill factor is an important consideration. If there is a wind (or if you are moving at snowmobile speeds) the actual temperature on your body is considerably lower than the thermometer reading. You must plan for this lower temperature as you choose your clothing.

WIND SPEED**	ACTUAL THERMOMETER READING (°F)							
	40°	30°	20°	10°	0°	-10°	-20°	-30°
	Equivalent temperature (°F)							
calm	40	30	20	10	0	-10	-20	-30
5 MPH	37	27	16	6	-5	-15	-26	-36
10 MPH	28	16	4	-9	-21	-33	-46	-58
15 MPH	22	9	-5	-18	-36	-45	-58	-72
20 MPH	18	4	-10	-25	-39	-53	-67	-82
25 MPH	16	0	-15	-29	-44	-59	-74	-88
30 MPH	13	-2	-18	-33	-48	-63	-79	-94
35 MPH	11	-4	-20	-35	-49	-67	-82	-98

Little Danger (for properly clothed person) Increased Danger Great Danger

Danger from freezing of exposed flesh

** Estimated wind speed in miles per hour

SNOWMOBILE SUITS

Snowmobile suits may be the nicest thing to have come between you and the weather. To insure that a snowmobile suit does that, wind, snow, and cold have to be taken into account. Snowmobile suits should be wind resistant, water repellent, and provide warmth with minimum weight. Since a snowmobile suit represents a big clothing expense, purchase it with great care.

Recently snowmobile suits have become very fashionable. You can select a two-piece or the standard one-piece suit, but a two-piece suit should have a longer jacket and a raised waistline on the pants to keep snow out. To insure warmth, many two-piece suits now feature a bib-type pant or a jumpsuit instead of pants. Suits come in many colors, but remember that lighter colors show the inevitable gas and oil spots very easily. If you choose a light colored suit, look for one that has an oil- and water-resistant finish that will help keep stains to a minimum.

* adapted from a University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension Service fact sheet written by Pamela Sue Sadowski and Ruth M. Diez.

It is virtually impossible to tell the performance qualities of snowmobile suit fabrics by examining them. Rely on good labeling and reputable dealers when you purchase a suit.

In addition to a fiber content label, every garment should have a permanent care label with cleaning instructions. Other labels or hangtags may give information regarding batting weight, yarn type, and finishes. Read the labels when selecting a suit.

The most common fabric used for snowmobile suits is nylon with polyester fiberfill used as an interliner. The fiberfill batting weight is expressed in ounces and is usually five ounces and over for snowmobile suits. The ounces refer to the weight of batt used per square yard of fabric.

Wet-look vinyl has recently become a fashionable fabric for snowmobile suits. However, vinyl tends to get slippery when wet, making it difficult to remain on your snowmobile. Some vinyls may crack under extreme cold, so buy from a reliable dealer.

Linings in suits may be a smooth nylon, flannel, or pile type of fabric. Which you choose is a matter of personal preference, but remember that a smooth fabric will slide off and on most easily.

Fit is another important consideration in selecting a suit. Put the suit on over clothing you normally will wear riding. Try bending, reaching, kneeling, and assuming other positions you use while driving a machine. Your suit shouldn't bind or pull.

Many companies are adding decorative reflective tape to suits as a style and safety feature. This makes you more visible when you are riding, walking, or if you should fall off. It also makes you easier to follow while trail riding. If the suit does not come with reflective tape, you may want to sew it on later.

Check the closures on a suit before you buy. Long leg zippers make suits easier to put on and take off. Front zippers should have a flap to keep snow from packing in and freezing the zipper. An underflap on a front zipper will keep it from rubbing and fraying clothing worn underneath. A two-way side zipper gives access to inside pants pockets.

Some women's suits feature zippered crotches or seat flaps for added convenience. Men appreciate a two-way front zipper on their suits.

Suit pockets should have a closure to keep objects from falling out and pocket flaps to keep snow out.

A hood should be removable because it is intended only for activities other than snowmobiling, which requires a helmet.

HATS AND HELMETS

Helmets are one of the most important safety features you can buy for snowmobiling. Some drivers feel the wrap-around helmet gives more adequate protection across the mouth and jaw area than the full coverage helmet. Make sure your helmet meets the minimum standards for motorcycle operation. Put colored reflective tape, on your helmet so you are easily visible when walking, riding, or standing.

You may want to wear some type of hat underneath your helmet. Knitted caps are quite good for this. Do not wear stocking caps with long tails. Trailing items are a serious safety hazard because they get caught easily in moving parts of the snowmobile and may cause serious injury or death. Your helmet liner or hat should cover your ears since they are very vulnerable to frostbite.

BOOTS AND SOCKS

Snowmobile boots are a good investment to keep your feet warm in any type of outdoor activity. They are warm, light-weight, skid-resistant, and waterproof. Snowmobile boots have rubber bottoms with nylon tops and felt liners. The strap across the front helps keep the boot on while going through deep snow.

When you buy snowmobile boots, get them large enough to allow adequate circulation. Try them on with the number of socks you intend to wear. Also check the tread on the bottom of the boots—the more tread, the less you are apt to slip. The felt liners in snowmobile boots provide most of the warmth. Remove them after each wearing, and dry them thoroughly. Some felt liners have side or front zippers for greater ease in putting on. The big white “bunny boots” are not recommended for snowmobiling because they get quite slippery.

Wool or acrylic socks provide warmth. Wool soaks up perspiration to make your feet comfortable. Two pairs of socks provide the most comfort and warmth; if you're allergic to wool, wear a lighter pair of acrylic socks under a heavier woolen pair.

FACE MASKS AND SCARVES

Many people like an all-in-one knitted hat, face mask, and scarf. If you choose this type of hat, get one with a single large hole for the face rather than eye, nose, and mouth holes. The single large hole provides adequate coverage for normal riding. Separate holes shift and pull, which is not only distracting but often blocks visibility.

People who are irritated by wool should purchase hats and masks of a man-made fiber such as an acrylic. In extremely cold weather you need to cover almost all of your face and a standard face mask is a good item to have. Try it on before you wear it to make any necessary adjustment in eye openings and fit.

Do Not Wear Scarves While Snowmobiling

Neck scarves are a serious safety hazard in snowmobiling. Strangulation has resulted from scarf ends catching in the snowmobile tracks.

SHIELDS AND GOGGLES

Because of speed and exposure to wind, always wear some type of eye protection. Cases of frozen eyeballs have been reported that could easily result in permanent eye damage. Flip-up face shields have become very popular; they can be lifted during stopping periods and to prevent fogging. Special adapters for flip-up visors are available for helmets.

Goggles protect the eyes, but may distort perception. If this is a problem, purchase a good quality lens goggle. Many are sold with different colored lenses. Clear or amber is recommended for nighttime and amber or darker for daytime. Never wear darker lenses at night because they limit visibility. Amber lenses are generally recommended for daytime because they help show bumps and holes in the snow.

Many helmets have a snap tab on the back to insert the goggle elastic. If there is no snap tab, tape the goggle elastic to the helmet to prevent the goggles from slipping off when raised. Try goggles on under your helmet to insure that they will fit properly inside the helmet face.

GLOVES AND MITTENS

Outer gloves or mittens must break the wind and provide protection from snapping twigs and branches, yet be flexible enough to allow free hand movement. Leather or high quality nylon are the best materials for this as vinyls often get stiff in the cold.

A gauntlet glove covers the gap at your wrists and keeps out snow. Never wear gloves with dangling buckles or pompoms. These may get caught in moving parts of the snowmobile and could result in serious injury or death.

Never wear tight gloves or mittens as they will slow down circulation and cause your hands to chill more readily. Liners in mittens or gloves will give additional warmth. The natural animal fibers such as wool, mohair, angora, or sheepskin work very well as liners. These fibers also absorb perspiration and help keep your hands more comfortable. Many people believe mittens are warmer than gloves because with fingers together they retain more body heat.

WHAT TO WEAR UNDERNEATH YOUR SNOWMOBILE SUIT

You will need freedom to move and room for air to circulate. In addition, clothes help you feel good, which is half the fun.

Put your clothing on in layers to trap air between layers and keep you warm. Thermal long underwear and a jersey top covered by warm pants and a sweater are good choices for colder days. Try bending and stretching in clothes you plan to wear. If they bind, they will surely hamper you when you ride.

Clothing must allow your body to breathe. Clothes that are too binding will cut off circulation and lessen your body's ability to breathe, resulting in a cool, uncomfortable, and unhealthy physical situation.

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