

Cold Fighters

One challenge that confronts snowmobilers is staying warm, especially on those “brass monkey” days when the mercury drops out of sight. Or if your body is particularly susceptible to cold, as seems to be the case with more women than men. But most of us have faced those deep freeze mornings when staying in a warm bed seems like the smart alternative. What’s more, cold can creep up on any of us when we’re tired or hungry at the end of a long day on the snow. And once it takes hold, riding with a dose of the shivers can be mighty uncomfortable. In my experience, cold either attacks the extremities or the body core. So let’s look at each scenario.

For core heat, which can have the most serious implications, I’ve found two options. One is a heated vest, powered by regular batteries or by the one in your sled, if it’s so equipped. This is an excellent alternative for those most susceptible to cold, as most makes offer various degrees of warmth, including an “off” setting. For me, the downside is the vest’s lack of breathability and failure to function as part of my high tech layering system to transfer body moisture away from the skin. Some of the wiring rigs can also be annoying and get in the way. And if you don’t need it anymore because the temperature warms up, where do you store it? That said, nothing can beat a heated vest if seeping cold in a major issue for you.

Option number two for core heat is a ThermoCare Heat Wrap from Proctor and Gamble. Available at most drug stores, these Velcro fastened waist belts place air activated chemical warmers over the lower back and kidneys — a favourite entry point for the big chill. Intended to provide a source of constant, soothing heat for back pain, a ThermoCare Heat Wrap can easily do double duty as a body heater. Like all chemical heat products, the ThermoCare Heat Wrap is expended after only



one use (and once activated, cannot be shut off), but puts out the warmth all day (or night) long. I like the convenience of being able to buy them most places and carrying several packs with me for application if and when needed.

Extremities are a different ball game. While rarely life threatening, super cold fingers and toes are uncomfortable enough to spoil your ride. Heated handlebars and thumb warmers are a big help, especially when you add a set of handlebar muffs to contain their heat and shield your hands from the cold wind. Battery powered, heated gloves and insoles are available, but I don’t like the wiring down my pant legs and sleeves that most entail. So when more heat is needed, I’m sold on the air activated chemical warmers like the Heat Treat and Heat Factory brands found in many outdoor stores.

They offer hand, foot, and toe warmers, plus many other unique products that provide a consistent, low-level heat for your choice of 5 to 24 hours. I’ve found the adhesive toe warmers to be especially effective. I always throw a bunch into my day pouch or touring bags in case the thermometer drops or someone requires emergency heat. Both of these companies also offer products for the body core, but I’ve never seen them in stores, so they must be an online order. I’ve tried them all and found the ThermoCare Heat Wrap to be the easiest and most comfortable to use. With any chemical warmer, watch those best before dates! For more info: Heat Treat - www.warmers.com; Heat Factory - www.heatfactory.com; or www.pg.com for ThermoCare.