

ASK THE RIDING COACH

With Rapid Training Coach Dave Hewson

'Is it really worth fitting the stickiest tyres to my road bike?'

Q I'VE TREATED MYSELF to a two-year-old Fireblade and am thinking about the tyres to put on it in readiness for the better weather. As it's a very powerful sportsbike I'm tempted to go for the stickiest rubber possible. Maybe a road-legal track tyre? I'll be riding on the road, but might do a trackday. What are your thoughts?

Stuart Yells

A I TOTALLY UNDERSTAND your logic because, in absolute terms, the stickiest rubber is found in race slicks, so surely they're perfect for powerful sportsbikes? Unfortunately, that's not the case if you're riding on the road - despite what some

tyre companies' marketing departments suggest.

The reason is operating temperature. Tyres that are designed for the track will have an ideal working range of 85-90°C, where they offer phenomenal grip. But they're terrible below that range - it's like riding on glass.

That means you have a vicious cycle: you take your Blade out on a summer's day but there's no grip because your tyres are only at 40°C and feel horribly sketchy. That means you can't ride fast, and because you can't ride fast you can't generate heat in the tyres, and without heat you have no grip... To break that cycle you need tyre warmers.

I can vouch for this because I once ran my road bike on some old Superstock race tyres that had the same compound and construction as slicks but with tread (ie, road-legal). Despite theoretically being very sticky, they were truly awful on the road because I couldn't get them up to temperature. Never again.

And that's without throwing rain into the mix: the chances of getting 'sticky' tyres anywhere near their operating temperature in the wet are next to zero.

Sports-touring tyres are a much better bet. As sportsbike riders, we often mistrust these because most of us are old enough to remember when sports-touring involved old fellas chuffing happily across the continent on their air-cooled BMW twins. But times have changed. Modern sports-touring

tyres are nothing short of extraordinary.

As a TT racer who rides briskly on the road, I never go fast enough for my sports-touring tyres to run out of grip in the dry. Never. In fact, I do a lot of my Rapid track coaching on sports-touring tyres because the performance is good enough for me to go faster than customers on big sportsbikes with track tyres on. You can go very, very fast on a modern sports-touring tyre.

Plus, because their operating temperature is so broad, they feel secure at temperatures down to about 5°C, which means you can push on, heat them up and unlock even better grip. The same applies in the rain.

Another advantage of sports-touring tyres is that they always fidget and move about at the limit of grip - they let you know. A very sporty tyre will do this if it's at exactly the right temperature, but when conditions aren't perfect (or you've slowed down), there's a very fine line between grip and crashing. Often, the first you know about it is when the front tyre folds.

If you truly need a sporty tyre that performs in all conditions and works well on track, you could do worse than the Pirelli Diablo Rosso IV Corsas that editor Matt has tested on p74 **R**



Modern sports-touring tyres should work perfectly in virtually all conditions on the road



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