

A Memorable Winter Ride

By AECS(AW) R. A. Averbeck,
VAQ-139

It was a winter afternoon in the Pacific Northwest, and the weather finally was nice for a change. It had been raining for more than a week, but, with the sunshine, I figured it was time to take a ride on my motorcycle.

I just had gotten my license that summer and still was eager to ride the first bike I ever had bought. With a full body suit to keep me warm, even with the temperature hanging around 42 degrees Fahrenheit, I was well-prepared. I probably looked like Snoopy going down the highway, though, because my roommate's girlfriend had made me a scarf to cover my neck, and I liked to let the tail hang out the back.

I left home around 1230, figuring I could be back in about two hours. I just was going to the base exchange to pick up some cigarettes—a 35-mile trip, one way. As I headed out of town, the roads had dried, and it was refreshing to be on the highway. “Why not have a great time and kick up the speed a little?” I thought. “No police ever patrol the flats, and, besides, you can see for miles.”

The trip through Deception Pass was a lot of fun until I came around the corner by Deception Pass Lake. The temperature suddenly dropped about 10 degrees in 50 feet. As I slowed down to keep the motorcycle upright in the corner, I started wondering about black ice. I'd seen this corner freeze before anywhere else during the five years I had been traveling back and forth to work. I could see ice on the edge of the lake, but the road hadn't frozen over yet, so I continued slowly.

When I came out of Deception Pass and entered Whidbey Island, the whole world had changed—it was white with snow. The roads still were clear, but the scenery looked a lot different, and it all had happened in only five minutes. At



this point, I decided to continue to my destination because it was only 7 miles farther.

The roads stayed fine until I arrived on the base; I now was traveling on hard, packed snow. To make matters worse, the road was one way, so I couldn't turn around. Luckily, sand had been put down, and I was able to keep moving slowly toward the exchange's parking lot.

As I turned into the lot, I saw several people watching me. My guess is they were wondering why any fool would want to be riding a motorcycle in these conditions. I parked, quickly made my purchase, and headed back home. I no longer felt like Snoopy; instead, I felt like parking my motorcycle to avoid continuing the 1-mph pace I was being forced to travel.

In the end, I made it home without incident and with a great story to share with friends over a couple beers. Since then, I have become something of a weather-watcher. I also have moved on to full-size 4X4 vehicles. When I ride my motorcycle—in any season—I carefully choose my destinations. ■