

New Metzeler winter tyres tested

► Designed for better grip in cold and wet ► MCN exclusive test on Metzeler's radical new scooter tyre ► Motorcycle winter tyres in development

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Another major manufacturer has produced tyres specifically for riding in winter conditions, using technology from racing wets and winter car tyres – and MCN has tested it.

A week after Michelin released their winter-friendly Pilot 3 tyre, MCN tested a tyre that goes one step further and is designed specifically for winter.

Called the Metzeler Feelfree Wintec, it follows the lead of winter car tyres used in northern Europe and uses a special compound and extra cuts in the tread, known as 'sipes'.

Though only available for scooters at the moment, Metzeler says the technology could move to bikes as early as next year. Salvo Pennisi, head of Metzeler's testing

It's possible with winter tyres to make a substantial step forward in safety

METZELER'S SALVO PENNISI

department, told MCN: "Our intention is not to stop development of scooter tyres. We're looking at development for motorcycles – we're interested to know if riders want winter tyres.

"It is possible with winter tyres to make a substantial step forward in safety – if a car changes direction in front of you at 40mph and you can stop sooner, it is

safer. Heated clothing, ABS and other advances provide more opportunities to use bikes in low temperatures, and we are getting more riders asking which tyre to use in winter."

While a scooter tyre isn't relevant to most of the UK motorcycling public, there's sound reasoning behind putting the technology into them first – there's an enormous scooter market in mainland Europe and a massive volume are used year round. Big scooters are also demanding on tyres – they're heavy, reasonably powerful, and give little feedback compared a motorcycle. Making a reassuring tyre for them is a bigger challenge.

Do the Wintec tyres work?

MCN was granted exclusive access to the Vizzola wet-weather test track near Milan, Italy, to test



Metzeler Wintecs on T-Max cut stopping distance by two metres

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the tyres. They were fitted to a Yamaha T-Max 500 and a Suzuki Burgman 650, both equipped with ABS, for three tests – braking, track and slalom. All were on normal road surfaces, kept wet with a sprinkler system. The temperature was a few degrees above freezing.

First, I rode the scoots on their original equipment tyres and the feel in the slalom and track tests was vague. Although the tyres never slipped, they were never reassuring, and caused the ABS to kick in on both scooters. Warm-up took several runs too – something that isn't possible on the road.

The tyres were switched to Metzeler's Feelfree Wintecs. Even though the tyres weren't scrubbed in – usually a recipe for disaster in the wet – the tyres offered instant grip. A few braking runs scrubbed the slippery

Sprinklers kept the track wet and temperatures were just above freezing



release agent off, and the difference became noticeable.

ABS intervention was reduced and from 40mph, stopping distance dropped from 19m to 17m – a significant amount in an emergency. Warm-up was much quicker too.

On the more subjective slalom

test and on the handling circuit the tyres gave me far more confidence.

I found I was more relaxed and more able to concentrate on where I was going.

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HOW DO WINTER TYRES WORK?

Unlike racing wets, which use heavy tread patterns and soft compounds to displace water and generate heat (and therefore grip), winter tyres have to work over a wide temperature range.

Although they are designed to work in sub-10°C temperatures better than normal tyres, the Wintec has to be safe in warmer temperatures too. The 'sipes' cut in the rubber are not for water displacement – the tread still performs that function. They allow movement in the

rubber, which helps generate heat, but are claimed not to compromise stability at speed.

Because the tyre gets warmer, the rubber becomes softer, and gives doubles road contact, says Metzeler.

The compound also contributes – a number of materials are used to create a balance of cold weather warm-up without unacceptable grip and stability compromise at higher speed. Metzeler says warm weather grip is only slightly less than a normal tyre.



Tiny grooves in Wintecs help tyres warm up fast