

Cover feature

Mountain biker

To stay upright on a mountain bike through a muddy British autumn and winter, you need balletic bike skills or tyres with a decent amount of tread. Some trail tyres are grippy enough for year-round use. Lightly treaded summer or XC tyres aren't.

If you can't afford a pair of grippy tyres, buy just one and put it on the front. Front wheel slides are way worse than rear ones. While some mountain bike tyres cost £80+, Specialized's are uniformly good value. The Specialized Hillbilly Grid Trail 2Bliss Ready T9 (£45, [specialized.com](https://www.specialized.com)) is excellent even before considering the lower cost. It's available in 29x2.4in and 27.5x2.4in.

Mudguards help prevent bike wear as well as keeping you cleaner and drier. Many riders use a fork guard all year to keep dirt out of eyes and fork stanchions. Rear guards are frowned on by fashionistas but do an even better job, keeping mud away from your bum, back and dropper seatpost. The Rear Mudhugger Mk2 (pictured on p55) offers extensive coverage and secure, stable mounting. Yet the older Small Rear Mudhugger (£24.99,

[mudhugger.co.uk](https://www.mudhugger.co.uk)) is £10 cheaper and nearly as good. Don't be misled by the name; it works with big tyres, too.

If you're not going to use a rear mudguard, at least protect your dropper seatpost from rear wheel spray with a strip of old innertube. Cable-tie it to the saddle rails and to just below the seatpost clamp.

Lights aren't on this list because, unlike commuting, mountain biking in the dark isn't a given. Having said that, night-riding need not cost a fortune. The Halfords Advanced 1800 Lumen Front Bike Light ([halfords.com](https://www.halfords.com)) is £60, while there are 1,000-lumen lights from about £10 on eBay.

A more tenacious wet lube is worthwhile for off-season mountain biking. My favourite is Nzero Wet Lube (100ml £9, shop.nzerowax.com). Don't just keep dumping it on the chain. First remove the gunk after each muddy ride. Two old toothbrushes taped together, heads facing, will get the worst off the chain. A flat-bladed screwdriver, an old nail brush and a rag can

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remove oily paste from jockey wheels, chainring and cassette. For the rest of the bike, water, washing-up liquid and brushes are all you need. Sluice off with plain water to remove any residue.

In terms of clothing, winter boots that are both warm and waterproof are the hardest to come by on a tight budget – except at Decathlon. Quechua Warm Hiking Boots NH100 Mid (£29.99, [decathlon.co.uk](https://www.decathlon.co.uk)) are fine in rain, mud or freezing conditions. While not designed for cycling, grip is good enough on flat pedals with pins.

Long-finger summer biking gloves will be OK in milder autumn weather. As it gets colder, you will of course want thicker gloves, an extra layer up top and either three-quarter shorts or trousers for knee cover. 🌞



Mountain biker essentials

- Small Rear Mudhugger £24.99
- Specialized Hillbilly Grid Trail 2Bliss Ready T9 tyre £45
- Nzero Wet Lube, 100ml £9
- Quechua Warm Hiking Boots NH100 Mid £29.99

TOTAL £108.98

Front and rear mudguards limit the wear to your fork stanchions, dropper post and washing machine



Left: Joobze Dymond