

Personal Protective Equipment

Dress for the Crash

Have you ever seen a star NFL wide receiver jump up to catch a pass, only to be immediately pummeled by a 300-pound linebacker with bone-jarring speed and power? Now imagine he took that hit without wearing any protective padding. Pro ball players wouldn't dream of taking that kind of risk. Riding motorcycles also requires protective equipment and failure to wear it isn't just reckless, it's stupid. Many experienced riders say it's not a question of if, but when you will be involved in some type of accident. Most are minor, but even minor inci-

dents can be deadly without the right protection.

Proper riding gear for riders and passengers should include, at a minimum, over-the-ankle boots, long pants, a riding jacket, full-fingered gloves, eye protection, and—above all—a helmet manufactured to meet U.S. Department of Transportation standards.

Protective riding gear is particularly important for motorcyclists because of their increased vulnerability. Unlike automobile drivers, who are surrounded by a steel cage, motorcyclists are completely exposed to the elements: hot and cold weather, rain,

stones and other road debris, and even bugs. All of this can negatively affect your comfort and safety on the road, but proper riding gear minimizes this discomfort and danger, and can also save your life in the event of a crash or fall.

Helmets

It's impossible to overstate the importance of wearing a helmet each and every time you ride your motorcycle. Your skull is no match for the pavement, even at a slow speed. Helmet technology and design have made helmets lighter, more aerodynamic, better ventilated and more comfort-





Proper PPE includes an approved helmet, bright-colored jacket, full fingered gloves, and over-the-ankle boots.

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able than ever. While most states have mandatory helmet laws, other states consider it a matter of personal choice. Regardless of what state you are riding in, ALL NAVY AND MARINE CORPS motorcyclists are required to wear helmets, on or off base, every single time.

Choosing the Right Helmet

Try before you buy. This is essential since every head is shaped differently and every type of helmet shell has a slightly different shape. Properly fitting the helmet is important. A properly fitted helmet won't irritate your head or

slip and move on your head when fastened. Fit is important for both comfort and safety.

Modern helmets come in three basic styles: Full-face helmets, three quarter or open face helmets, and partial coverage, or half helmets. A full-face helmet offers the highest level of protection, providing coverage for all of your head, including your chin and jaw. A movable face shield protects your face from wind and debris and can be easily opened with one hand to provide access and additional ventilation. A three-quarter helmet is constructed from the same basic components but doesn't offer the face and chin protection of full-face helmets. Half helmets are similar to three-quarter versions but expose more of the lower jaw, sides, and back of your head.

Some riders find half and three-quarter helmets more comfortable and less restrictive, but it is important to note that these helmets offer less protection than full-face versions.

Standards and Ratings

There's really only one thing to keep in mind when it comes to effective motorcycle helmets. Make sure there's a DOT or Snell certification sticker somewhere on the inside or outside of the helmet. This signifies that the helmet meets or exceeds all relevant safety test standards of the Department of Transportation and/or the Snell Memorial Foundation, a private helmet testing group.

When to Replace a Helmet

Helmets are designed to take the damage that your skull would oth-

erwise sustain in a crash. Therefore, even after a single impact, it will lose effectiveness and should be replaced. Aside from impacts, age can also affect a helmet's ability to protect. Repeated use can compress the comfort fit liner, and ultraviolet rays can break down the outer shell. It's a good idea to replace your helmet every few years because helmet technology continues to advance. Regularly upgrading your helmet will keep you outfitted with the best possible protective gear.

Footwear

Over-the-ankle boots provide the highest level of protection for the feet, ankles, and shins, and are least likely to come off in a crash. Sturdy boots will protect your feet from stones and other road debris kicked up from the highway, can protect you from burns caused by hot exhaust pipes, and will help you operate the shift lever and brake pedal more effectively. Rubber soles provide good grip on the pavement when you're stopped and will help keep your feet on the footrests while riding. Boots come in street riding (touring) and competition (racing) styles. Street riding boots usually include some padding over the toe, ankle, heel and shin areas, and are engineered for comfort and style off-the-bike as much as for protection during a crash. Racing boots are designed for maximum protection and usually feature hard armor over the toe and other critical areas. They are usually quite rigid for support, and as such, can be uncomfortable when walking around off the bike.

Gloves

A good pair of motorcycle-specific gloves performs several functions: providing protection from sun, wind and cold; helping to maintain a secure hold on the handgrips; and in the event of a crash, minimizing cuts, bruises and other damage to your hands.

Gloves are available in a variety of styles, ranging from lightly padded models to racing types with

No one is aiming a lance at you, but you still need your armor.



hard-plastic armor covering all possible contact points. Obviously, a fully-armored racing glove is going to provide the best protection, but something like this might be uncomfortable for daily use. Lightly padded gloves provide more freedom of motion while only sacrificing a minimum of protection. Choose the type that is most suitable for your intended use.

No matter which type you choose, it's important to get a good fit. An overly bulky glove will make it difficult to operate the motorcycle's controls. Gloves that are too tight will restrict circulation and cause your hands to lose feeling or be overly sensitive to temperature. A good-fitting glove should be snug, without restricting circulation or movement.

Make sure your gloves have a secure strap system to keep them on in the event of a crash. Gloves are available in different weights for different seasons.

Clothing

Motorcycle clothing has become a high-tech industry. Your goal when shopping for motorcycle clothing

should be comfort, protection, and visibility—in that order. Just as there are different types of motorcycles geared toward different sorts of riding, there are different types of motorcycle clothing geared toward different sorts of riding.

Once you've determined what style of jacket and pants to buy, it's time to explore the features. First, consider what material to select—leather or textiles. In general, leather offers better abrasion resistance and breathability, while textile garments are more weatherproof and better in cold temperatures—not to mention the fact that they're usually cheaper than leather.

More important than the material is the fit of the protective garment. The fit determines both the comfort and protection. Fit varies from person to person and application to application, making it essential that you try before you buy. Make sure that your riding clothes fit snugly—more so than other clothing you're accustomed to wearing.

Not only must the gear fit well, but it also must fit in the riding position. For example, the fit of a

sport jacket is tailored for a sport-bike riding position. This is critical, because if the front of a jacket is too long, when you lean over on the bike, it will push the shoulders up. If the back is too short, it will pull up and expose your back. Therefore, on sport jackets, the front is cut shorter than the back, which feels all wrong walking around the showroom but makes perfect sense when you sit on the bike.

Choose brightly colored clothing to make yourself more visible. If you wear dark clothing, consider a reflective vest over your jacket. It's also a good idea to affix reflective tape to garments you wear when riding.

Hearing Protection

This last piece of PPE is often forgotten, but whenever you ride, even on a quiet motorcycle with a full-face helmet, your ears are exposed to wind noise. Long-term exposure can cause irreversible hearing damage. Properly worn hearing protection can reduce wind and engine noise and allow you to hear important sounds like car horns and sirens. There are a variety of styles to choose from. ■