



Between the Lines

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Gearing up—it's not just about style; it's also about comfort and protection.

It was not like Pete Crowley, a H.O.G. member from Coral Springs, Fla., to head out without his riding gear, but this was a “special occasion.” ...

I had just gotten the 30,000-mile service done on my Wide Glide—new tires, new brakes, and while I was at it, a new billet headlamp. I was very excited to get to the dealership, pick up my jewel, and go for a ride. “Go, go, go,” I said to the bus driver under my breath. “Don’t you know I’m in a hurry?”

Then it occurred to him: In his excitement to get out of the house and on the bus to the dealership, he had neglected to grab even his basic riding gear: gloves, boots and helmet. ...

“No problem,” I thought. “I’ll just ride straight home and get them before I set out on the ‘real’ ride. It won’t be the first time I’ve ridden without my helmet.”

But it was nearly the last. As he was cruising home, “at peace with the world” on his shiny, new Harley, a driver made a sudden left turn into Pete’s path. There was no time to react and ... Bang! ...

In a second, it was over, and I found myself face down on the pavement, with blood flowing down my face. I did a quick inventory and found I had movement in my arms and legs. But my ankles were scraped and swollen—my sneakers had provided no protection at all. My bare knuckles were scraped up pretty good, and two of my fingernails were partly torn off. My T-shirt was ripped, and I had road rash on my back and shoulder. Did I already mention how lucky I feel to be alive to write this?

Pete’s story is not meant to be a scare tactic. It’s simply a reminder of how easy it is to take for granted the protection our riding gear provides and how the lack of it can turn what otherwise might be a relatively minor crash into something you’ll wake up feeling for weeks—or worse. (And Pete’s bike? Didn’t make it.)

Covering Up

There's nothing like flying down the open road with the wind in your hair, the sun on your skin, and the world at your feet ... until something unexpected happens. That's why it pays to wear the proper protective gear.

Protective gear doesn't simply reduce your risk of injury in an accident; it also enhances your riding comfort by reducing your exposure to wind, rain, cold, road debris, flying insects, and more. How much riding gear to wear is a personal choice (with certain choices mandated by state or local law), but Harley-Davidson strongly recommends wearing a proper amount of gear every time you ride, including a DoT-approved helmet, a long-sleeve jacket or shirt, sturdy long pants or chaps, full-finger gloves, and over-the-ankle boots.

By properly gearing up for your ride, you reduce your risk of injury, increase your comfort, and help make sure you get the most out of every ride.

Helmet. Your most important piece of protective gear, a good helmet provides more than vital protection in case of an accident. It also deflects bugs and road debris, lessens the impact of the elements, and cuts fatigue by reducing wind noise and blast. Three different basic styles are available to meet individual rider preferences, but always select a DoT- or Snell-approved helmet. [*OpNavInst 5100.12G requires "a properly fastened (under the chin) protective helmet certified to meet U.S. DoT standards. If the host nation does*

not have an equivalent helmet standard, the helmet will meet the U.S. DoT standard. Fake or novelty helmets are prohibited."]

Full-face helmet. It offers the most protection—covering the ears, sides of the face, and chin. Most models feature airflow venting to enhance comfort in warm weather. The face shield can be worn in the raised position to further enhance airflow [*not true for Sailors*].

Three-quarter (open-face) helmet. It covers your ears and sides of your face. Most can be fitted with a face shield and/or a visor for extra protection. This helmet reduces wind noise more than a half-helmet.

Half-helmet. It sits on top of the head, while leaving your chin and the sides of your face exposed. Most can be fitted with a face shield for extra protection. This helmet is light and cool in warm weather. Making sure your helmet [*regardless of style*] fits properly is essential.

Eye protection. Even if your motorcycle has a windshield, additional eye protection is highly recommended—and sometimes required by law. Depending on what type of helmet you wear, an impact-resistant face shield may be just the ticket. Just make sure it's clean and free of scratches that can blur your vision.

If you prefer not to wear a face shield, look for goggles that meet the ANSI Z87.1 standard or impact-resistant sunglasses that meet ANSI Z80.3. Just





remember that goggles and sunglasses do not protect your face and chin from debris or insects you may encounter on the road. *[OpNavInst 5100.12G requires “properly worn eye-protective devices (impact or shatter-resistant goggles, or full-face shield properly attached to the helmet). A windshield, fairing or eyeglasses alone are not proper eye protection.”]*

Jacket. Talk about an icon! Perhaps nothing says “motorcycling” like the classic leather jacket. But it’s more than a fashion statement; it’s an important piece of gear. A sturdy riding jacket protects your upper body and arms against perpetual road demands, whether it’s wind, sun, bugs, or debris.

Riding jackets are available in a wide range of weights, styles and prices—in leather, all-weather nylon brands, or a variety of other abrasion-resistant materials. Many offer special features for rider comfort, protection or convenience, such as body armor, vents, removable linings, or extra pockets for storing cellphones or other important accessories.

Visibility is another important consideration. Black is certainly stylish but is not the best choice for being seen. When riding at night or in inclement weather,

consider wearing a retro-reflective vest to improve your “conspicuity.”

Pants. For comfort and protection in the saddle, long pants are a must. Avoid loose-fitting styles that flap or tangle in the wind, and steer clear of tight-fitting pants that restrict movement. Instead, choose comfortably fitting bottoms made from an abrasion-resistant material like leather or denim. For an extra layer of protection and warmth, add leather chaps over your jeans.

Gloves. Motorcycle gloves protect against wind, sun, rain, cold, pavement, and blisters while aiding your grip on the hand controls. Gloves should fit snugly but comfortably. Fingerless, full-finger, and gauntlet styles provide a range of coverage. They are available in a variety of materials, weights and thicknesses, with functional features for any weather condition. *[OpNavInst 5100.12G requires full-finger gloves/mittens designed for use on a motorcycle.]*

Boots. Proper footwear should be over-the-ankle boots, with sturdy heels and non-slip soles. This not only provides ankle support and firm footing but protects you from hot exhaust. *[OpNavInst 5100.12G says, “Sturdy footwear is mandatory. Leather boots or over-the-ankle shoes are strongly encouraged.”]*

Raingear. A change in the weather doesn’t have to mean a change in riding plans—not if you pack a reliable set of raingear. Staying dry keeps you more comfortable so you can focus on your travel itinerary—and riding according to the conditions. Components include jacket, pants, gloves, and waterproof boots or rain gaiters. Also, because raingear is usually reflective, consider slipping it on for added visibility when the skies darken, whether rain is in the forecast or not.

Cold-weather gear. Riding in colder temperatures simply means layering gear for warmth or hooking up to electrically heated clothing to keep you toasty along the route. Serious cold-weather gear includes heavyweight jackets with quilted liners, full-face helmets, heavyweight full-finger or gauntlet gloves, and heated clothing—all designed to keep you warm, regardless of what the thermometer says.

Here’s another tip: Once again, your trusty raingear can come in handy in the cold. Slipping it on in cold conditions can go a long way toward blocking the wind and reducing the chill factor.

Epilogue

In August 2003, H.O.G. members Mike and Marcia Reich of La Verne, Calif., were riding with friends when it started to rain. After stopping for gas, they put on their rainsuits (over their leather jackets and chaps) and continued on. Marcia, from her vantage point on the passenger seat, describes what happened next: ...

I was admiring a rainbow when I felt a hard shake, and the next thing I knew I was sliding down the wet pavement on my right side. I could see the bike sliding several yards ahead of me, but I couldn't see Mike. Then I started rolling.

When she finally stopped, Marcia realized she was in the middle of the road. Seeing two 18-wheelers behind her, she jumped up and ran to the side of the road, only to realize the trucks had stopped and were blocking traffic. Then she saw Mike running toward her. ...

Mike was OK, too! We had been going 55 to 60 mph when we hit a very slick spot on the road. As far as we could tell, I had been thrown off the bike, while Mike stayed with it until he lost his grip. Mike, the bike, and I separately bounced, slid and rolled.

It was a scary moment for them both, but neither Mike nor Marcia was hurt seriously. ...

Mike got a pretty good-sized strawberry on his hip where his chaps didn't cover and an abrasion on his arm where his leather jacket wore all the way through. His helmet had a chunk out of it, but he had no head injuries. I needed stitches in my elbow but had no broken bones.

And the bike? Again, not so lucky. It sustained about \$15,000 worth of damages—only the engine was salvageable. However, given what might have been, Mike and Marcia consider themselves very fortunate. ...

We were lucky, but we also were prepared. If we had not been wearing all the right gear—helmets, leather chaps and jackets, boots, goggles, and gloves—things would have turned out very differently. 🍓

