

Choosing Protective Clothing

When choosing motorcycle protective gear (other than the helmet) here is a handy rule. Buy gear that offers superior protection to areas of the body where the bone is just below the surface of the skin e.g. knuckles, shoulders, hips, knees and ankles. Injuries that occur in these areas can take up to two years to heal properly as the skin being so thin has difficulty regenerating itself. Look for garments with thick soft body armor stitched into these key areas. In some circles hard body armor is considered less effective.

Your average motorcycle shop is the place to start your shopping for your helmet, gloves and jacket. However, there are numerous online shopping opportunities, too (e.g. www.motoport.com).

The Crash and Slide Factor

You need to assess all your riding gear in terms of a crash and slide accident. Will your pants, jacket and gloves stay where they are meant to be or will they slide up (or down) as your body slides along the road? This means that all cuffs (e.g. wrist and ankles) must be securely fastened. Also the belt and Velcro fasteners, if any, around the midriff area are tight enough to keep the jacket down.

Sliding across the road on your butt causes a huge amount of heat to be generated. This means that any garment that can only take a cool iron (230 degrees F) will melt if it comes into contact with the road surface. If the fabric is also against your skin it will melt right into your flesh and make your road rash even worse.

Pants

Most bikers wear denim jeans but studies have shown that cotton is not resistant to the abrasive forces in a motorcycle accident. They also take a long time to dry which creates problems should it rain or you need to wash them on a long tour.

If it's jeans or nothing for you look for Kevlar reinforced denim pants. You can find them on the web pretty easily. Leather chaps that fit over your regular denims are also an option.

Boots

Most safety conscious bikers use strong outdoor-type boots that offer firm ankle protection. The sole should not make gear changing awkward, but still allow walking around town comfortably. In the event of an accident you want a boot that will brace your ankle and a sole that will not bend, twist or collapse thus preventing your foot from being crushed. Remember that in non fatal accidents the most common permanent, debilitating injuries are to the feet, ankles and lower legs.

They should have a breathable/waterproof inner layer (e.g. Gortex) which not only offers protection from rain but offers more warmth.

Gloves

There is only one story with gloves and that is... protection, protection, protection. The skin around the fingers and knuckles is thin and does not heal easily.

You also need protection against the weather. Cold hands do not give your brain the feedback it needs to control things like hard braking on slippery surfaces. Conversely desert riding in thick warm gloves can drive you nuts with the heat. This means owning two or three pairs of gloves.

Motorcycle Jackets – Leather or Synthetic?

When choosing your motorcycle jacket you will be faced with the decision of synthetic or leather. Consider the table below which outlines some of the advantages and disadvantages of each. For those of us who use our bikes a lot, travel at reasonable speeds and live in a hot climate you need to invest in an air flow jacket. This is a synthetic jacket made of a mesh-type fabric that allows air to penetrate. Modern products have good protective armor and offer good crash and slide protection. You will need a rain suit in your luggage as the wind chill factor is significant and this jacket offers zero warmth and waterproofing protection.

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Leather Jackets

Advantages	Disadvantages
Can last a long time if cared for	Dark in color- affects visibility
Classic styling prevents it from looking dated	Heavy in weight
Cheaper than synthetic jackets	Not as waterproofed
Has an attitude, history and tradition	Some are fashion garments and should not be worn for riding
The leather is it's own protection	Usually do not have body armor sewn in
Smells great especially after it's treated	Traditionally shorter in length
Can often be worn as a regular garment	Must be treated to keep it soft and waterproof
Does not show dirt	Hot and uncomfortable in the heat

Synthetic Jackets (e.g. Cordura)

Advantages	Disadvantages
Brightly colored, often with reflective strips	Does not last as long
Almost totally waterproof-great for touring	Styling becomes dated, begins to look grubby and the colors fade
Many have zip out linings - good for touring	A lot more expensive
For hot climates many have special airflow fabrics allowing air to penetrate	Offers no weatherproofing at all. Cooler temperatures require an undergarment
Cannot usually be worn as a regular garment	Lighter in weight.
Has body armor sewn into the lining	Cleaning can be a complex operation to not damage the weatherproofing. Soft armor is regarded more effective than hard