

## Safety Gear: The only thing that separates you from the road, part 1

One of the things that make motorcycling enjoyable is the freedom of riding in the open air. Unlike car drivers surrounded by a steel compartment, motorcycle riders feel as if they are a part of everything around them. Of course, sometimes being out there can have its drawbacks, such as when you are riding in extremely hot or cold weather, when it's raining, when insects are pelting you, or when debris flies up at you. It's for these types of situations, and possible encounters between you and the asphalt, that protective gear was developed.

Protective gear has two basic purposes: protection and comfort. Uncomfortable gear can distract you from riding. Properly fitting protective gear will help you stay comfortable when encountering various riding conditions. In the event of a crash, protective gear will help prevent or reduce injuries. This article is going to focus on how wearing a helmet can help keep you riding safe!

The most important piece of protective gear you can wear is a helmet manufactured to meet DOT standards. Helmets help protect your head in four ways. First and second, the outer shell resists penetration and abrasion. Third, inside the shell is the equally important impact-absorbing liner that absorbs more of the shock by slowly collapsing under impact. Fourth, the soft foam and- cloth liner next to your head helps keep you comfortable and the helmet fitting snugly. The retention system, or chinstrap, is the one piece that keeps the helmet on your head in the event of a crash. Both shell and liner spread the forces of impact throughout the helmet material. That's why, in most cases, if a helmet has been damaged in a crash, it will not be protective in another mishap and should be replaced.

Consider how a full-face helmet makes riding more comfortable. It cuts down on wind noise in your ears and windblast on your face and eyes. It deflects bugs and other objects that fly through the air. A helmet even adds protection from inclement weather, reduces rider fatigue, and even helps make the rider more aerodynamic (full face helmets). (from *MSF: Personal Protective Gear for the Motorcyclist*)

Does it really work? "I was commuting to work on my motorcycle and headed onto the freeway exchange at about 45 mph. I lost control and laid down my bike, really hit my head, and slid my way to a stop. My motorcycle was scratched, my helmet was banged up, and the rest of my gear was pretty shredded. But I walked away. The thing is, I never used my helmet where I lived before because I wasn't required to wear it. Moving to California meant I had to wear one and I am so glad that I did. My helmet saved my life." – Jonathan Hailstone, CA

Wearing helmets that meet the Department of Transportation (DOT) standard is the single most effective means of reducing the number of people who get injured or die from motorcycle crashes. Traumatic brain injury is a leading cause of motorcycle crash death. Even when not fatal, these debilitating head injuries can mean a lifetime of costly rehab and severe emotional trauma for family and friends. Helmets do not restrict a rider's ability to hear important sounds or to see a vehicle in the next lane. There are no negative effects from helmet use. (from *CDC: Motorcycle Safety: How to Save Lives and Save Money*)