The “Save Your Hide” Guide

What to look for in protective gear

Even small injuries can cost more than the total worth of your bike...and the garage you park it in. Some manufacturers use consumer ignorance to sell products that are very profitable but unsafe. Good gear can make all the difference, here’s few tips on how to choose.

Priorities of purchase

Will this save my skin?

Nothing says irresponsible amateur “squid”, like riding with no protective clothing. So how do you choose the right gear? When you meet the pavement unexpectedly you want 3 things, impact protection, abrasion strength and tear strength. Look for pliable dense foam padding inserts for impact protection. Look for quality safety lock stitching; your gear is only as strong as it’s seams. A simple fall at 30mph can subject your clothing to more than 30 pounds of tearing force. Fabrics with similar thicknesses and feels can have vastly different protective characteristics.

Kevlar

Dupont strikes again

In order to give it the proper motorcycle abrasion strength Kevlar must be woven together with Cordura and Lycra, ei Schoeller’s Keprotec. These are the only suits approved for road racing other than leather. Some gear manufacturers use small portions of pure Kevlar as a gimmick. Quality full suits of it can be found. This gear is lighter, offers greater protection and it breathes. It slides on pavement the same way as leather and dissipates friction heat better than leather. Due to its’ innate toughness during construction and the fabrics limited availability it is not widely marketed so it will take a bit of looking to get one.

Nylon

Only certain grades of nylon will do

Many names are given to types of Nylon to make it sound impressive. Only Cordura Nylon or Dynatec of 620 Denier or above is suitable for motorcycle gear. Denier refers to the thickness of the fibers in the weave, higher denier means higher abrasion and tear strength. Be aware that due to cost, some makers coat their nylon with a layer of polyurethane that under heavy pavement friction can melt into your skin.

Leather

Who wore it before you did?

Leather has long been a good protective fabric. However, many variables can effect its’ quality including, the type, age and diet of the animal it came from. Different methods used to clean, tan and dye the leather effect it as well. Unfortunately the best way to tell if the garment is made of good leather is to look at the price tag. Good leather costs more and that cost is passed on to the consumer. Leather should be worn snug because when leather folds it’s tear strength lowers considerably. As an organic material leather dries out and looses it’s flexibility over time. In fact each time leather gets wet and dries it can loose up to 20% of it’s tear and abrasion strength. If you purchase leather, get the best you can and care for it habitually, even if it’s just hanging in the closet.

Tear and Abrasion Strength by the numbers

	Pounds of force until fabric tears	Abrasion cycles on pavement until fabric fails
CottonJeans	4.5 pounds to tear	50 cycles to failure
70 Denier Standard Nylon	4.5 pounds to tear	165 cycles to failure
500 Denier Polyester	8 pounds to tear	180 cycles to failure
200 Denier Standard Nylon	7.5 pounds to tear	275 cycles to failure
500 Denier Cordura	22 pounds to tear	710 cycles to failure
620 Denier Cordura	35 pounds to tear	1200 cycles to failure
NEW Competition Grade Leather	80-110 pounds to tear	1200-1700 cycles to failure
1000 Denier Cordura	110 pounds to tear	1780 cycles to failure
Air Mesh Kevlar	1260 pounds to tear	970 cycles to failure
Stretch Kevlar Blend	420lbs pounds to tear	1800 cycles to failure