

Gearing Up

WHILE I HAVE NEVER BEEN A FAN OF THE PHRASE *dress for the crash*, I certainly cannot deny that it's a logical, smart, and safe thing to do. Motorcycle gear should meet three important criteria: comfort, protection, and visibility. Can you get some

or even all those virtues in another style of clothing? Probably, but the significant thing about motorcycle gear is that it's designed for riding. Seems simple enough, but sometimes the simple things are easily overlooked.

Comfort in gear can cover various different aspects. Besides feeling good, it should also offer certain levels of protection for specific conditions. Vented jackets, pants, or gloves supply airflow during hot conditions; heavier gear or even electric/heated gear fights off the cold elements; rain gear should be able to keep you dry and so on. Motorcycle jackets are made with extended sleeves for when you're reaching to the bars. Some jackets are even manufactured with a slight bend in the arm to give a better feel, the same goes for riding pants. Many glove companies construct their products with curved fingers so they have a natural feel while holding the grips. Often jackets and pants come with additional adjustments for not only a better fit but to prevent the material from flapping in the wind. Comfort is crucial when checking out gear. The distraction of ill-fitting gear — whether too tight or loose, too long or short — can definitely become an annoyance and take away from your ride.

Besides comfort, protection is just as important. While I recognize there are thousands of bikers out there who have ridden without issue plenty of times in just jeans and T-shirts, are you willing to take that risk? Heavy-duty jeans you get from a department store may only give you about 5'-10' of sliding protection at a low speed. Not too good! Your exposed skin offers zero protection when it's ground against the pavement, definitely not good — in fact, very painful. Gear for riding comes in various materials from leather to fabrics like Cordura that defend one's body from the infamous road rash.

Additional protection can be made available from having armor or padding in spots such as shoulders, elbows, knees, hips, and back, all points where the bones are close to the skin. Also, some of the levels of comfort could be considered protection; such as the dryness of rain gear, the ventilating capabilities of a jacket to prevent you from overheating, or its warmth to fight the cold. If you're too hot, too cold, too wet, and so on, you'll probably be miserable and thinking about

how quickly you can rectify it. The problem with that is if you're concentrating on discomfort you're not paying attention to your riding. That could be an open door for trouble.

When it comes to visibility, I know most riders lean toward the traditional black jacket, pants, and helmet. Listen, I get the fact that black is what bikers wear; it's cool looking, sliming, rebellious, sexy, tough, whatever, but it's not one of the bright colors in the spectrum. If you're going to wear black, consider gear that has reflective piping; it will help make you just a bit more visible. If you don't mind looking like you're a school crossing guard or road construction worker, toss a reflective vest over the jacket. You can always take it off when you're not riding. The bottom line is, bright colors are more visible to those around you and doing what you can to help them see you may be a good thing. The number one response from a driver when he has an accident with a motorcycle is "I didn't see him." We've all heard this at one point during our riding career, so why not do something to hopefully prevent someone from saying that about you!

We could spend a lot of time just discussing gear: from helmets to jackets, boots and gloves to goggles. But the important thing is to consider the right gear for the ride. There are plenty of manufacturers out there that make a variety of products for you to check out. Perhaps some of the best ways to find out what works before you buy is to read reviews (like the ones in *AIM*) and to ask other riders about what they like or dislike about the gear they have. Sometimes the best stuff for what you need may not be the most expensive. Maybe you'll have to give up some fashion over function, maybe not. It's all just another step in the process of educating yourself to not only enjoy the ride, but to get back home in one piece so you can do it again. **AIM**



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