



Get Into Gear

Text by: Jon DeVecchio

"Street Skills" is a feature to get you reflecting on your riding skills and habits. Each article will give you something to think about or work on to sharpen your riding skills for more safety and enjoyment. The articles are written by Jon DeVecchio, the author of Motorcycling streetSkills Flashcards and host of the streetSkills Motorcycle Safety Podcast. Visit www.streetskills.net for more information.

It's for wimps. It's not necessary on short rides. It's expensive. It doesn't fit right. It's hot. My friends don't wear it. Where do I store it on my bike? The "it" is proper riding gear. Have you ever made any excuses not to wear it? While I have on rare occasion ridden in street clothes, I enjoy motorcycling more because of my extensive "riding wardrobe". My wardrobe includes head-to-toe gear for all riding seasons and weather. It has taken me years to build up my gear closet, but it has been worth the expense and effort. You might be interested in what I've discovered as a gear guy. Ask any motorcycle instructor and they will tell you that proper riding gear makes you more comfortable, visible and protected (CVP). Greater comfort equals less fatigue, longer rides, extended riding seasons and more riding opportunities for you. Being visible is something every rider could use a little more of these days to prevent mishaps with other roadway users. Finally, gear provides protection. Like it or not, crashes are a reality of motorcycling. How well would you be safeguarded if a crash were to happen on your next ride?

Let's take a deeper look at riding gear.

Helmet

Comfort: Full-face helmets or those with large face shields will prevent riders from getting blasted with wind, rain, bugs and road debris.

Visibility: Studies show that lighter colored helmets are more noticeable than darker colors.

Protection: A good helmet is the best defense to save your brain from catastrophic injury if your head hits a hard object.

Jacket

Comfort: The temperature can fluctuate quickly when we ride. Rain

clouds can appear out of nowhere. While some riders own multiple riding jackets for each season, many jackets today have features that allow you to modify the jacket for the given conditions. Riding jackets are also tailored for a seated riding position.

Visibility: Lighter colored jackets which include reflective areas are more easily noticed by other roadway users.

Protection: Motorcycle-specific jackets include armor of varying quality in high impact areas. They are also very good at preventing road rash.

Eye Protection

Comfort: If you ride with an open-faced helmet, you're going to have to seek out options to protect your eyes. Eyes that tear or get something in them are aggravating and distracting. Safety glasses and goggles are good items to explore if you only ride in sunglasses.

Visibility: Eye protection is directly beneficial to your visibility, which might help keep you out of harm's way.

Protection: Try avoiding eye injuries by shielding your eyes with shatter-resistant lenses.

Footwear

Comfort: Proper riding boots can keep your feet dry and warm. Their over-the-ankle design can also provide excellent stability and grip at stops.

Protection: Riding boots have features to protect your ankles and other vulnerable areas of the foot. Numerous motorcycle boots don't have laces to get caught on foot pegs. Footwear with laces often have a strap or covering to stow them out of the way.

Gloves

Comfort: Wet or cold hands are uncomfortable and distracting. So are overly hot hands. Full hand function is vital to controlling a motorcycle. It might be a good idea to keep several pair of gloves on your shelf for a vari-

ety of riding environments.

Protection: The human hand can tolerate abuse, but still has limits. Sturdy riding gloves can prevent nasty road rash on the hands you count on every day.

Pants

Comfort: Many riders have no clue that riding pants exist and simply wear jeans. However, there are vast options for riding pants. Examples include mesh pants, over pants, and even specialized jeans that have more abrasion resistance. Many of these pants offer waterproof characteristics.

Visibility: Once again, lighter colored pants which include reflective areas are more easily noticed by other roadway users.

Protection: Like jackets, motorcycle-specific pants include armor of varying quality in high impact areas. Pants can prevent road rash as well.

Rain Suit

Comfort: Most riders would agree that riding wet is no fun. Specialized rain suits are available to stow in your bags if your gear isn't already waterproof.

Visibility: Many of the rain suits available are black. Higher visibility colors like yellow and orange are also popular. Whichever color you choose, look for rain gear with reflective strips.

Hearing Care

Comfort: Have you ever ridden with ear plugs? Even with a full-face helmet, wind noise can be fatiguing to riders. Hearing loss is a real possibility after years of riding. You can spend a few dollars all the way up to hundreds on ear plugs. I'd suggest starting with the cheap ones and see if they work for you.

There are even more gear options out there, such as heated clothing, body armor and even neck braces.

STREET SKILLS

My advice is to "get into gear" and seek out available gear options. Even with the many deals out there, gear will cost you money. On the flip side, gear is well made and will last a long time. This will allow you to build up an assortment of riding equipment.

Visit a local motorcycle shop or your favorite online retailer and buy a new piece of gear. Pay attention to those ads in the back of magazines for interesting gear options. Use CVP to help identify gaps in your present gear selection and get shopping.

A good gear collection will ensure you'll be ready to ride in whatever Mother Nature throws your way. You just might find excuses to take more rides if you have the right gear nearby.

Flip back to our Holiday Gift Guide on pages 15-17 for reviews of some gear that will make gift shopping AND riding easy as well as safe!

