

Protective Gear: What's your excuse?

By Mark Caldwell

We all know that we *should* wear good protective gear while riding. Yet often, we fool ourselves into thinking that, “well, hey, nothing is going to happen to me because I’m a good rider and I pay attention, and the chances are low, and these jeans and long-sleeve t-shirt meet the minimum requirements for the Rider Ed program commitment I made, and it’s hot and those things are so uncomfortable...”

Recognize any or all of that thought pattern? I certainly do. I’m guilty of it. But even worse, I’m guilty of being judgmental of others riding around in their short-sleeve shirts, or cutoff jeans and flip-flops, thinking they’re crazy, but I’m not. So let’s take a minute to get honest with ourselves. First of all, yes, jeans and long-sleeve shirts are slightly better than shorts and t-shirts, but they’re nowhere near as good as leathers, ballistic nylon, or Kevlar in case of an emergency. And let’s get totally honest here and admit that sometimes, things go horribly wrong, and the totally unexpected happens. With his permission, I’ll use my brother Scott as an example.

Scott is an excellent motorcycle rider. He has ridden his Goldwing for many years and in fact he is a Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) instructor, teaching both the basic and experienced rider courses. About three years before he became an instructor, Scott had one of those “unexpecteds” happen to him. While riding down Highway 3, which he travels all the time, a truck pulled out in front of him unexpectedly cutting across the lanes of traffic. Scott hit the truck, went flying through the air and tumbled down the road. Thankfully, Scott always wears good protective gear, and survived without too much injury. Now, lest you think he wasn’t practiced, let me tell you that in the 6 years preceding his accident, Scott had taken two basic courses (BRC:RSS) and two ERCs. His riding skills probably lessened the severity of the accident, but he could not avoid it entirely. And to this day, Scott wears a Helmet Survivor pin on his vest as a reminder for us all.

So, back to my point, which is that things happen, and some day you may be in the position where you need the protection. My question is, after that happens, will you be thankful that you had the proper gear on, or will you be **sore**-ly wishing you had?

OK, so let’s deal with the excuses. The most commonly heard excuses are, “my jeans are good enough”, “that riding gear is expensive” and “it’s too hot”. OK, let’s start with the jeans. Do you **really** believe that those blue jeans that get holes in them from the washing machine will stand up to a 30, 45, or 70 MPH slide? When David Hough came to speak to our chapter last January, he talked about how little protection they really are. Normal jeans will shred within the first few seconds of a slide.

What about price? Come on now, surely you’re not going to give me that excuse, you ride a Goldwing! As soon as you bought a Goldwing, you automatically gave up the right to use cost as an excuse. And if you’ve added **anything** (chrome, lights, GPS, etc.) you’ve given even more lie to that excuse. And for those of you who don’t ride a

Goldwing, should we talk about your latte habit, cable TV or dining out? You think riding gear is expensive, you ought to check out the cost of repairing the human body!

And now for the heat. Hey, I understand. The first year I rode my Wing, I had a nice heavy coat and over-pants both made by First Gear. Great equipment! I was very well protected, especially when it rained. But boy it sure did get toasty in the summer time. Even when I opened all the vents in my jacket and the sides of the pants, it was still warm. The next year I invested in mesh riding gear for the hot weather, a great set of mesh pants and jacket (again from First Gear, I like their stuff and it fits me well). That was definitely cooler than the other set of gear, but at times, in direct mid-day sunshine, it can still get pretty warm.

So this year I decided to try something new. A couple of years ago at the International Motorcycle Show, I saw a vendor booth showing off something called Draggin' Jeans. These are denim jeans (available in blue or black for you style-conscious types) that have Kevlar reinforcement in the seat and around the knees. I have been wearing them for a couple of weeks now and have found that they are nearly as comfortable as regular jeans with the added peace of mind that you'll get more protection if you need it. And at the reasonable price of \$90 / pair, they're not that much more expensive than a regular pair of jeans. I really like them for days when I ride to work. I can wear them all day without looking like I'm layered up for a disaster, yet still be protected while I am riding. The company also makes Kevlar reinforced shirts. But remember that the Kevlar is great for skid resistance, but does not provide extra padding like many riding pants and jackets do. The company does offer additional armor padding inserts for their products as well, to address that concern.

So there you have it. If you like the feeling of jeans and a long-sleeve shirt, now you know that you can get them with reinforcement to give you the protection you deserve. Or you can get the mesh, or go for the leathers, whatever fits your style. So please, gear up, just in case, because all your Friends for Fun, Safety and Knowledge want to see you come back safe.