

Protective Apparel

By Trish Fink

Road Rash, aside from the popular game, is the scraping away of your skin, etc. from your body parts as it slides along the road surface. Abrasions and possible lacerations are extremely painful. Your best choices for protection are thicker leather and abrasion resistant advanced technology lightweight fabrics such as Cordura, Gore-Tex and Kevlar.

Keep in mind that Cordura nylon fibers will stretch over the bumps and snap back to shape. Kevlar fibers do not stretch and will grab the surface bumps and pull apart. Kevlar is always mixed with other fibers. Denim will not protect you! The clothes that you wear when you are riding are best when they meet certain requirements that depend on the current weather; keeping you warm, not making you too hot, fit well when in a riding position, protecting your skin, not flapping in the wind, letting the air flow through, keeping you dry, keeping the cold wind out, buffering an impact, not interfering with the control of your bike and making you visible. Wearing a leather jacket and denim pants only gives you half of the protection you need. Chaps are easily taken off if you stop and get off your bike to do other things. You can buy perforated, vented leather or the synthetic mesh for hot summer days. The roads abrasive surface is just as effective at removing your skin on hot summer days as it is on the cooler times. A good practice on those days that feel like you are driving in front of a hair dryer, is to wet down your shirt under your jacket. It may be comfortable to ride with short sleeves, shorts and sneakers in the summer, but there is a risk involved that can affect the rest of your life.

A few manufactures offer body armor or jackets with air bags. Another idea is the airbag vest, which is worn over the rider's jacket. The airbags protect your cervical spine, ribs, chest, spine and abdomen. For full protection, the jacket must be zipped up. A ripcord that attaches to the bike that activates the piercing of a CO₂ cylinder that is located outside of the airbag. This cylinder can easily be replaced after it has gone off. This implementation could cause serious injury if the airbags malfunction or some factor would cause them to fire off while the rider is on the bike. Manufacturers claim that the airbag will only go off when the tether is ripped away with 25 – 55 pounds of force from the bike connection. Getting off of your bike and forgetting to unhook the cable will not cause the airbags to inflate. You could end up tipping your bike if it is light weight or a scooter. This means however that you have to be thrown off your bike in order for the airbags to activate. The airbags also take longer to inflate than a car airbag. Protection is best if you are thrown some distance to allow the air bags time to inflate. Police and military in several countries, including the US, use this technology. These jackets are difficult to find in this country for the general public. This technology is very new, but it holds promise.

Drivers wearing reflective or fluorescent clothing had a 37% lower risk of crash related injury than other drivers. The use of a white helmet was associated with a 24% lower risk than wearing a black helmet, and daytime use of headlights was associated with a 27% lower risk

A brief note about underwear; many riders wear silk boxer shorts when they go on rides. The smooth surface glides versus drags during movement. Tightly-whitey's have seams and leg bands that can end up pressing themselves into your skin and chaffing. Long leg briefs are also popular. Bicycle pants worn without underwear are specifically made for long periods of sitting, sweating, and rubbing. They also have a sitting pad. Sheepskin seat covers offer additional padding and also help airflow. A sweaty butt on a leather seat can get very uncomfortable.