

## From Your Rider Educator

With the temperature in the 50's on Friday I finally got the Wing out of the garage and managed to do some riding. As I rode along the backcountry roads I began to do some thinking about what we wear when we ride. My accident three years ago and Ray's recent accident have made me think more and more about safety and trying to minimize injury if and when some unconscious 4-wheeler decides not to see me and I and the bike go down.

### **HELMETS**

Prior to my own collision, with a van that pulled out in front of me, I had been wearing a helmet about 50% of the time. The wind in my hair and face had been one of the prime reasons to ride especially during the summer. On that warm summer day, the ONLY reason I had a helmet on was because Ray and I were going to ride the interstate. I hit the ground at about 10mph and there is a gouge about ½" wide and deep into my helmet. With out the helmet that would have been the left side of my head. Even at that reduced speed my injuries would have been severe.

When we recovered Ray's helmet after his accident we found that it had hit the ground so hard that the outer shell had completely fractured. Needless to say, without his helmet that would have been his skull and he might not have survived.

### **SHIRTS/JACKETS**

During the Fall/Winter/Spring months most of us are pretty good about wearing leather or synthetic motorcycle jackets. Not so much for collision protection but for protection from the cold. While I still wear my leather jacket I have begun to wear a synthetic ¾ length jacket, which incorporates foam armor along the elbows, shoulders, and back. Ray was wearing a heavy Carhartt work coat over a set of insulated bib-overalls. These remained intact and provided some cushioning but they lack the foam armor of the motorcycle-specific gear.

It is in the hot summer when most of us make our widest departure from safe riding apparel. On many rides with many chapters I have seen many wingers riding with only T-shirts, shorts and sandals. As for myself, during the summer months, mostly as protection from the sun, I have always worn a white denim long-sleeved shirt. I was wearing this shirt when I hit the ground. The heavy denim was ripped and gone in an instant leaving my bare elbow to drag along the ground. Injuries to my arms kept me from riding most of that summer. My heavy denim shirt had offered very little protection from injury. I have since begun to wear a nylon-mesh jacket WITH foam armor over my T-shirt. While it is warm while standing still, while riding, moving air flows easily through the open mesh and if I do go down again it won't be my naked elbow dragging along the asphalt

Remember the sun will heat up your naked skin plus give you a great sunburn. SHADE your skin, you'll be cooler, and you might as well include some impact protection.

### **PANTS**

Like most male riders my standard lower riding apparel for all seasons has always been a pair of denim blue jeans. My experience with the denim shirt above has lead me to speculate that in a contest between asphalt versus denim the asphalt is going to win leaving my naked legs to slide down the highway. So for the last year or so I have been looking into alternative riding apparel to my blue jeans.

**First**, there is the biker's time-honored riding gear: LEATHER. Leather offers no insulation from cold but is an excellent wind stopper. Leather also offers no impact resistance but is an excellent protector from road abrasion. I have both leather chaps and pants. Both work well in cool temperatures but are very uncomfortable in the hot summer since they do not allow air to pass through and neither takes very well to rain.

**Second**, Synthetic nylon over-pants. Nylon offers many advantages over leather. Coarse open weaves will allow air to flow through the material carrying away heat and sweat. Foam armor can also be included in internal pockets offering impact protection to hips and knees. Such coarse weaves are not waterproof but an inner layer of gore-tex can be added making the pants waterproof and wind-proof as well. Add a zip-in insulation layer and you have winter riding pants. While nylon does offer protection from the surface of the road it can heat up in a slide and melt. Molten nylon and skin do not make a good combination and as such should never be worn alone.

**Third**, if you just cannot give up your denim jeans there are companies with offer jeans with a Kevlar layer in the seat, knee and hip area. The Kevlar layer prevents the jeans from coming apart in a slide and as such keeps your skin intact. Kevlar alone offers no impact protection but these can now be had with foam armor included.

## GLOVES/BOOTS

These obviously offer both weather and impact protection. Our hands and feet are in the air stream flowing past the moving bike. Rocks, bugs, and road-debris can strike both. At 65 mph those collisions are painful or worse and could lead to loss of control of the entire bike. In a fall one instinctively put ones hands and arms out to break the impact. Imagine your unprotected hands or feet sliding along the asphalt highway for a hundred feet or so. To continue to protect you your gloves and boots must remain in place on your hands and feet. Loose gloves and boot can easily come off in an accident leaving you with no protection. Gloves need a wrist strap to secure them and boots should fit snugly and require so effort to remove. That is why many types of motorcycle boots have zippers or Velcro flaps to secure them in place ON your foot.

As motorcyclists we accept certain inherent dangers and we use our skills and knowledge to minimize those dangers. Proper protective motorcycle apparel is not a panacea but if today is the day that you are going to have an accident be DRESSED FOR IT so that you can walk away from it and ride another day.