



OMMRA Information Bulletin Special Issue

From Paolo Volpara on Monday, November 20, 2000

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Dressed To Ride

Following a good number of requests and several discussions on OMM e-mail I decided that it would be useful (at least for some of our readers) to summarize our experience in riding-wear. Your contribution to this brief article will be highly appreciated and we will include your experience with Producers or Suppliers in our web-site and bulletin.

THREE PRINCIPLES

- “When Skin and Asphalt meet, Asphalt wins”. OMM Riders are fanatical about always wearing protective gear when riding. This rule covers also small rides (from your house to your favorite bar) until we will receive from Supreme Authority an absolute guarantee that “that car” will not hit us in the first 10 miles of our trip. **Helmet, Jacket & Trousers, Boots, Gloves must go in before starting the engine.**
- “Form follows Function”. When selecting a piece of gear do not be attracted by the appearance. Think about the function that the item has to perform and buy the best performing one. You do not need an extra pocket if you cannot reach it comfortably... you do not need an extra strap that will fly when riding... you do not need a super-gadget that will malfunction during the trip.
- “Buy quality and keep it well”. A good set of leathers will last for decades if properly kept... a good helmet will cover the rides of three years if you dedicate time to maintenance. A Professional Rider can be judge by the way he keeps his own gears. It is always surprising to see riders spending good money to buy the latest machine and not investing a small fraction in protective clothing. One does not need a lot of stuff and, when biking, you (thanks God!) do not have to follow the last minute fashion. Go back to Rule Number two: consider the function.

LIST OF FUNCTIONS

- Helmet: high resistance to impact and valid distribution of impact forces in case of crush, good visibility, low level of noise, comfort for the head.
- Gloves: high resistance to abrasion, efficient cuff straps keeping the gloves in place

when sliding, gauntlet overlapping the jacket cuffs, good sensitivity, protection from rain, comfort and (for winter gloves) protection from cold.

- Boots: padded area protecting feet bones (frontal and lateral), flexibility, protection from rain, comfort and (for winter boots) protection from cold. You should also be able to walk with your biking boots on without major problems or without looking ridiculous.
- Jacket: resistance to abrasion, protection pads in key area (back, elbows, shoulders), protection from external elements (rain and cold), good fit when riding (belt, long sleeves, longer back, straps to avoid flapping, bottom and wrist straps), comfort and functional pockets (at least one waterproof).
- Trousers: resistance to abrasion, protection pads in key area (hips and knees), easy to put on and off, connection with jacket, comfort.

HELMETS

The helmet must be full face... I know that it is nice and pleasant, in summer, to have wind on the face and I know that “the chopper look” demand open face helmet but... It is sufficient to see (without being active part) the result of a simple slide on the tarmac (that bloody oil slick!) to appreciate the protection offered by a full face helmet. The normal signs of impacts are on the side of the helmet from the top down to the chin bar and is more pleasant to leave on the asphalt carbon fiber than skin. Flip-Open Helmets are becoming more popular and some of them already passed the European Approval Tests. BMW has been offering this model for several years and it has been joined now by all major producers. Providing one keeps the visor-chin bar locked when riding these helmets give a remarkable level of protection. We had report of Flip-Open helmets opening under impact but we could not confirm one single case. It was mostly due to improper locking of the mechanism by the user. Shoei, AGV and a little know Marushin are among my favorites but I had over the year good experiences with Arai, Nolan, FM, Airoh, Suomi, Caberg and Bell.

Check the Stamp of Approval Snell or DOT standard, ECE ONU 22-04

You should look for a good fit trying the helmet extensively before buying: in the last years mayor producers introduced different sizes for removable inner pads: this feature allows you to choose the best inner fitting and to wash the liner avoiding the familiar problem of bad smell.

You should also look for active and passive ventilation with good entry of fresh air and efficient extraction of the stale one. It does not matter how well ventilated a helmet claims to be... it will always have fogging problems in cold and/or wet weather. The best solution so far is “Fog City” a plastic shield to fix on the inside of the visor creating a “double glazing” effect that effectively prevent visor condensation and mist.

On the outside a careful application of Rain-X once a month facilitate the dispersion of rain. Look for a sealing visor with a “small-opening” fixed position: in case of real bad weather it can still assure visibility.

Take good care of the helmet by cleaning the external surface with neutral soap and abundant water after every ride, clean the visor with water and soft cloth and once a month dismount the visor for a complete cleaning and lubrication of the lifting mechanism.

Never hang the helmet on the bike: it will always drop. Never carry the helmet in the bike luggage without a proper bag. At home keep the helmet in a dry and ventilated place, in a protective bag, with newspaper stuffed inside (to eliminate smell and dampness).

A final warning: all producers charge a lot for special graphics. Check the plain version of the model you selected and you will save good money. Quote: *The dense saying, "If you've got a five dollar head, wear a five dollar helmet", should be augmented to read, "If you've got a five dollar head, wear a five dollar helmet, otherwise wear a Dohan or Rossi graphics if you've got more money than Midas or Warren."*

Helmet Accessories: On the market you can find good foam for cleaning the interior, visor cleaners and polish protectors. I also recommend a strip of Sun Downer to apply to the upper part of the visor on sunny day: I am against tinted visors that are also illegal in certain countries. You can find the removable strip at Gene's Gallery (1529 E. St.Louis Street, Springfield, Mo. Fax 417 831 3105). Finally, remember that visors can break or get seriously damaged: in a long trip bring with you a spare one or a set of goggles.

BOOTS.

When I buy a pair of boots I always think about long rides of 2/3 weeks when every piece of equipment has to perform several tasks. For this reason I recommend to buy high specification boots with plain black look to be used as normal shoes after riding.

Let's see the specifications: high enough (over the ankle) to comfortably tuck in the end of leather trousers but not too large over the calf in order to wear them under the when it rains. Good padding and hard protection on the sides and reinforced heel cup/front area. Elasticized calf and gearshift reinforcement. Water proof with Gore-Tex or similar lining: check the position and the protection of the zip (Velcro closure is the best) to be sure that water will not leak through. Gripping sole (oil resistant) offering positive sensitivity: try them on the bike to see that the boot does not interfere with the levers.

If you are riding off-road or if you are racing in circuit you should have, beside your Touring set, a pair of Moto-cross boots and a set of Racing boots: the specification of these two types differs considerably from the standard touring footwear being specifically designed to offer extra protection for extreme conditions. In any case riding with walking boots or (even worst) normal shoes calls for injuries to the ankles and burns from the hot engine/exhaust.

When buying try the boots with tick socks: in winter you will use thermal ones (they now produce them in breathable water repelling material) while in Summer you can use a walking socks further reducing vibrations.

My experience is limited to AlpineStars: I had several pairs of these boots (as matter of fact I still use a pair going back to the 60's) and I never had to complain. AlpineStars also takes care of new soles when needed. OMM Riders had positive experience with Daytona, Spidi and BMW.

Boots accessories:

Everyone riding for hours on the rain will tell you that even the most waterproofed boot will soon or later leak. I found that, in severe conditions, it is useful to use a "boots jacket" to wear on top of the footwear for extra protection. These are thermo-sealed over-boots in heavy plastic that slip on and off quite easily occupying very little space in your

bags. The alternatives are Totes over-boots in rubber: totally waterproof they are quite difficult to put on (especially when you are in the rain and on the side of the road). Nikwax or similar waterproofing products will take good care of your boots maintenance.

GLOVES

When the biker goes down, hands are the first to take the impact: wind, sun and flying stone can seriously damage your hands: a bug at 120kilometers per hour on your knuckles can be quite painful and it may generate dangerous reactions.

A good set of leather gloves makes the difference and the search for the perfect glove never ends. Ideally you should have in your stock three set of gloves: a full leather pair with high specifications, a pair of emergency gloves in hard leather and finally a pair of heavily insulated winter gloves. You should always carry the emergency (mid season) gloves in your trips.

Fits crucial and you should spend good time in testing it before buying: too loose or too bulky gloves can generate blisters and reduce your capacity of controlling the bike. On the other hand too tight gloves can cut circulation and generate cold, numb hands.

Leather tends to open up and get looser after wearing and you should take this factor into consideration: wear the gloves and sit on the bike before buying: check the grip, check if you have loose wrinkles on the palms and check if the seams are comfortable.

Specification should include: impact pads around the knuckles and back of the fingers, padded wrist protection, palm abrasion protection, adjustable straps around the wrist and the gauntlet, good and comfortable lining securely fixed inside (not to come loose when taking he gloves off), water proofing. Straps are extremely important because in case of accident they keep the gloves on. Protection can come in different form: Kevlar layer between the leather layers, Carbon fiber panels on the outside, Kevral panel on the outside etc. For winter gloves top insulation is essential and an aluminum foil panel between layer is highly recommended.

Brands? Again good experience with Alpinstar, Sidi, Dainese and, as multipurpose gloves, the Elkskin Roper 445 of Raiderwearhouse. Bad experiences? A lot of them including BMW winter gloves leaking after 1 hours of rain.

Gloves accessories:

You can find the “Zen Glove Maintenance” at page 21 of the Riderwearhouse Catalogue: I recommend a good waterproofing grease, cream or liquid to put on gloves every month in winter to keep them supple and proofed. I always carry a pair of kitchen gloves to wear under riding gloves in extreme cold weather or torrential rain. More stylish alternative are over-gloves mittens in thermo-sealed plastic (as the over-boots) and thermal gloves liner (in acrylic or silk).

JACKET AND PANTS

This could be a never-ending chapter. Our garages and closet contain a quite large collection of “experiments” some successful some less. I will stay here on the basic. Two schools (and you pick up freely the favorite one or, like me, you choose both according to your riding style of the day): Leather or Synthetic.

Millions of words have been written on the advantages of one or other material: at the end it all boils down to the quality of the gear you buy. Bad leather is worst than good synthetic... bad synthetic is worst than bad leather... and so on.

The second alternative is “one piece” or “two pieces”. For short rides the one piece has definitely the advantages of convenience and protection but in long trip the two pieces suit shows more adaptability and usefulness.

Checks and Fitting: Wear the suit (one or two pieces) on the bike and check for bulkiness in areas like underarms, crotch, and knees. Control as well the lengths of pants and jacket when in riding position and experiment with boots/gloves tucked in and out. When testing the fitting consider room needed for thermal underwear and winter clothes. Test the pockets: accessibility, tight closing under speed, capacity. One pocket should be “dry” under heavy rain. Impact protections (EC approved) should cover: elbows, shoulders, back, hips and knees. The pads should be removable for replacement and cleaning but securely fixed in order not to move under impact. Give attention to the quality and efficiency of the zips and to the stitching (double stitching in key areas). Finally consider the visibility you want to gain with the suit: reflective panels (3M Scotchlite) and bright colors can contribute substantially to your safety.

Synthetic: Check for ventilation giving preference to material like Gore-Tex: vent zipper under arms or on the back can provide additional comfort in hot weather. The resistance of material to abrasion is essential; heavy Cordura came out as the best in all tests conducted by motorcycle magazines on synthetic material.

Leather: check for the quality and thickness of leather. Control the zips and the seams together with reinforcements in crucial area. Today is possible to buy leather suits treated for water repellence. Ventilation is possible with the use of perforated panels.

Waterproofing. Even the best w/p suit will leak after long period of severe rain. The first rule is to keep waterproofing the suit with appropriate products (Heavy Duty Scotchgard for Synthetic and for Leather) or to use a re-waterproofing treatment while machine washing the suit. The second alternative (the first one if you wear leather) is to carry a light overall suit in nylon to put over the raiding suit at the first sign of rain. The overall takes really little space, it can be left permanently on the bike and it works as an emergency item in many circumstances. When buying one check the seams for professional sealing and particularly check how easily you can wear the overall when fully dressed for riding (consider: you will wear it on the side of the road, under rain, with your suit wet and your muddy boots!).

Brands. For many years I have been wearing Andy Goldfine products and I never had to regret this choice. Aerostich Roadcrafter and Aerostich Darien are perfect, in my opinion, for any situation. I would recommend the first one (in two pieces) if you ride a sport or sport-touring bike while the Darien suits well users of dual sport (Enduro type) bikes. The Darien Jacket and Pants proved to be also a very good every day suit that you can wear (without looking alien) after the ride. The reversible insulating fleece jacket of the Darien is by far the most versatile piece of gear I ever had.

Dainese is another favorite of mine for leather suits and also for **synthetic** combinations.

ADDITIONAL PIECES

If your suit does not have back protector you may consider to buy a “**web**” to wear under it and linking a set of protective pad. From Dainese you can get several models including back protector only, light shoulders and chest protectors with heavy back protector, etc. The advantage of the “web” (to be worn as an underwear shirt) is that it keeps the protectors in place firmly and you can wear it under different configurations of suits. Also to consider, as alternative, is a **kidney belt** with lower spine protection: for the one of us used, from old times, to wear a kidney belt this represents a valid solution. **Neck warmers**, under triangular form or tube, are, in my opinion an indispensable item: the tube offers the advantage of less bulk and it is more versatile for use also in summer months.

Under the riding clothes you should have a set of **thermals** (shirt and pants) for the winter and a **light underwear** suit for sweat absorption in the summer. A fleece jacket (Polartec) and a set of fleece pants may be the best solution for cold days when layering is essential.

Finally, for the riders sensitive to cold, the market offer a good selection of electrically heated clothing, from gloves to vest/jackets and pants. Gerbin’s (www.gerbing.com) offers a totally heated suit.

“I WOULD LIKE TO TRY”

The motorcycle gears market produce every day new ideas: some are just “fashions of the moment” but some new items attracted my attention:

- New inflatable vests from Spidi (D.P.S.) and Dainese (D-Air). These are the bike version of the airbag for car (next we will have safety belts on bike...) inflating when the riders “leaves” the bike
- New Spidi Tourex Jacket in the H2OUT line
- New Clover Jacket Rostock waterproof
- New Momo Roader pants at www.momodesign.com
- New Caberg 299 helmet
- New Spyke “T-Shield” leather suit
- The classic “Oregon Trail” leather long Jacket at www.roadgear.com
- New Speedstar gloves at www.teknicgear.com
- ...And as usual, on top of my dreams, a BKS leather racing suit...

WHERE TO FIND: SOME USEFUL ADDRESSES.

Two essential catalogs: the Riderwarehouse for Aerostich/Darien suits (and millions of other accessories including waterproofing/maintenance treatment) at www.aerostich.com. The MPS catalogue for spare parts and bike accessories has also a good selection of clothing (including Sub-Zero thermal underwear and gloves) at www.thefastone.co.uk.

Another good catalogue is the Firstgear at www.intersportfashions.com. Although focused on military items the Silvermans catalogue at www.military.co.uk offers several

pieces useful for bikers including police style jackets, booths and thermal gear. Ridegear at www.ridegear.com, Chapparral at www.800-841-2960.com and www.denniskirk.com all from USA are my last recommendations.

For all other producers check on the link page of www.ommriders.com (this page will be re-organized before the end of the year) or use one of the “motorcycle search engines”

Ronny Cramer’s at <http://sepnet.com/cycle/index.htm>

Bikelinks at <http://www.dropbears.com/bikelinks/>

Motodirectory at <http://www.motodirectory.com/>

Searchbike at <http://www.searchbike.com/>

Bikenet at <http://www.bikenet.com/>

Motorcycleonline at <http://www.motorcycle.com/>

Bike Europe at <http://www.bike-eu.com/>

Help us in improving our experience by taking part in the “Readers Search” compiling the questionnaire below and sending it to our e-mail address.

Name			
e-mail Address			
Bike		Year	
Best Jacket		Worst Jacket	
Best Suit		Worst Suit	
Best Gloves		Worst gloves	
Best Helmet		Worst Helmet	
Best Boots		Worst Boots	