

The Heads-up on Helmets

When it comes to safety, beauty can't be only skin deep.

A motorcycle helmet is not a novelty. Your helmet is a serious piece of safety gear, and should be carefully selected. Whether you've always worn a helmet or wearing one is new to you, here are some basics you need to know in order to optimize your safety and comfort on the road.

While it may seem like there are as many helmets to choose from as there are roads to ride, all helmets have four major components:

- a rigid outer shell
- an EPS (Expanded Polystyrene) impact-absorbing liner
- padding for fit and comfort
- a retention system.

NOTE: All Harley-Davidson helmets meet DOT requirements, and some are SNELL approved.

Choose from 3 basic shell types:

ThermoPlastic

These helmets are made from thermoplastic, a single-layer, injection molded material. Due to its single-layer construction, a thermoplastic helmet requires a larger inner impact liner, which in turn increases the shell size and weight.

Fiberglass

In general, fiberglass shells are stronger than thermoplastic shells because the shell material is comprised of multiple layers of fiber cloth, combined with multiple layers of resin. The strength of the fiberglass weave allows for a smaller inner liner, which is why fiberglass shells are typically lighter and more compact than thermoplastic shells.

Carbon Fiber

Carbon fiber helmets are made of multiple layers of extremely strong, carbonized Kevlar® fibers, along with multiple layers of resin. Due to the inherent strength of both carbon and Kevlar, less material is needed to achieve maximum helmet performance, strength and durability. As a result, carbon fiber helmets are significantly more lightweight than a comparable thermoplastic or fiberglass shell.

Choose from 4 styles:

Half

They're small, light and cool in hot weather. Because they cover the least amount of head area, they offer basic protection.

Three Quarter or Open Face

A step up in coverage, providing more protection for the sides of the head. Warmer to wear than a half helmet, however most are equipped with venting systems for added comfort. Some three-quarter helmets come equipped with a face shield or snap-on visor.

Full Face

Full coverage of head and face, for optimal protection. Equipped with a flip-up face shield. Warm in the winter and, with a flow-through ventilation system, comfortable in warm weather, too.

Modular

A combination of the benefits of full-face and three-quarter helmets. Flip up the face/chin module for ease in taking on and off and for full face exposure. Always ride with the module in the closed position.

Make sure your helmet measures up

Proper fit is vital to the performance and effectiveness of any helmet. Here's how to find the helmet that's the right fit for you. Remember: All helmets fit differently, so always try a helmet on before you purchase it.

First, measure the width of your head

Position a standard tape measure approximately one inch above your eyebrows. The tape measure will indicate the size of helmet you should start with. If your measurement falls between two sizes, try the larger size first.

Check for proper fit by ensuring that:

- Place helmet on head and fasten the chin straps securely so that there is no space between your brow-line and the inner lining.
- To test the fit and the retention system, move your head from side to side and front to back. You should feel the skin on your head move with the helmet. The helmet should fit as tightly as you can comfortably wear it, because the helmet's inner liner will compress with use.
- With the chin strap securely fastened, you should not be able to roll the helmet forward, off your head. If you can, the helmet is too large. You should try on the next smaller size.
- Wear the helmet for at least fifteen consecutive minutes prior to purchase, to ensure that there are no uncomfortable pressure points. If you do experience uncomfortable pressure points, try on a helmet that is one size larger.
- If you typically wear eyeglasses or sunglasses, bring them along to ensure that they will fit without causing pressure points at your ears and the bridge of your nose.

Care & Maintenance

Here are some tips to maximize the life and effectiveness of your helmet

- Never expose a helmet to chemicals or excessive heat. These may degrade the protective properties, even if damage is not visible.
- Never hang a helmet on a motorcycle's mirror, turn signal or sissy bar. The EPS impact-absorbing liner can be easily damaged.
- Before riding, make sure chin straps are tightened properly and not frayed, make sure visor screws and face shield are tightly affixed.
- If a helmet is dropped or suffers any impact, it should be replaced immediately. Impact may fracture the outer shell or compress the impact-absorbing liner, and the damage may not be visible.
- Manufacturers and the SNELL Foundation recommend helmets be replaced every 3 to 5 years, depending on use. Glues, resins and other helmet materials break down over time and hair oils, sweat, cosmetics - even the sun's UV rays - can add to helmet deterioration.
- Use a mild soap and water to wash the outer shell and clean the shield with warm water and a soft, lint-free cloth as soon as possible after dirt accumulates.
- Hand wash the internal liners with mild soap and allow to air dry.
- Use compressed air to clear helmet air vents and channels.
- DON'T use solvents or chemicals to clean any part of the helmet or shield, as they can destroy protective coatings and compromise the structural integrity of the helmet.
- DON'T use a dry cloth to clean debris from a face shield or you might scratch the shield.