

Helmets.
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Recently helmets have made the news quite a bit. Last May a New Jersey senator tried to get a national helmet law passed which would have forced states to adopt helmet laws or lose a big chunk of federal highway money. The law was defeated by a very wide margin with both Wisconsin senators voting against. Since I always wear a helmet this really did not affect me, but for some it is a very hot topic. Some see helmet laws as an assault on the whole sport of motorcycling and fight the laws passage with vigor. I think we should pick our fights a little better to help preserve our rights. Helmet wearing riders will get more respect than those that don't.

Recently a non-motorcycling friend of mine asked me a good question. "If car drivers must wear a seat belt when driving why shouldn't a motorcyclist have to wear a helmet?" I really did not have a good answer for him. Recent studies show that 80 percent of car drivers are now buckling up. I would even bet that some of these that buckle up every time, they drive are some of the same riders who ride without a helmet. To me this just does not make sense. You do not have to be going very fast at all to go down and hit your head on the pavement. Quite a few motorcycle accidents happen at very slow speed and some have resulted in head injuries for non-helmet riding participants. The term donor cycle makes me shiver but helmetless riders help to perpetuate this term. This term has made it's way into the hall of law making bodies and the new media lately. I fear what will happen if it ever make a dictionary.

Helmets have changed over the years. They have gotten lighter and breath much better than they used to. They are cooler to wear in hot weather, warm in the cold and easier on the neck muscles. Last week I saw a rider out on the freeway going 60 mph with no helmet while the temperature was a mere 37 degrees. I could not help but think that this rider would have been much warmer and lot more comfortable with a helmet on his head. I just don't understand the logic to not wear a helmet when it would have made him safer and much more comfortable. Riding with the wind going across the top of your head at this temperature will also increase your risk of hypothermia because most of our body heat is lost through the top of our heads. We all know that hypothermia causes loss of motor skills and slows logic needed to ride adding to the danger level.

I also overheard a conversation this week between two riders I did not know. One said his wife bought his son a full-face helmet at a rummage sale. He told the other rider that he could not afford the high priced helmets the other rider wore. While the idea is good the practice of buying a helmet without knowing if it is any good is a bad one. Most people cannot tell if a helmet has been used in an impact. Helmets only work once. If the prior wearer of this helmet used it in a fall it may not have messed up the shell but it could have compressed the protective foam on the inside. This is why helmet manufacturers will inspect a suspect helmet for free in most cases. As a rule I replace my helmet every five years just because wearing the helmet causes the foam to compress. While this mother saved \$100 dollars buying used she may pay it later in medical bills if her son ever really uses this helmet in a crash.

There is the old saying that if you have a \$10 brain you buy a \$10 helmet, if you have a priceless brain you buy the best you can. I'm not sure how this applies to someone who refuses to wear a helmet but I can guess.