

Safety Riding Tip

by Dave Steele

The Helmet Center / 623-444-4789



The \$80 helmet vs. the \$800 helmet:

We have many people ask us - what's the difference between an \$80 helmet, and an \$800 helmet? To the average person, they look the same. But the differences are major when it comes to protection and comfort. Let's talk first about protection and the helmet safety ratings.

The most basic rating is DOT (Department of Transportation). This rating simply indicates that a manufacturer believes that its helmet meets the DOT standards, without any actual testing on the helmets themselves. This also means this helmet is legal to be worn in states that enforce a helmet law.

This is usually the only rating on helmets under \$100. Most helmets above that range will also have a SNELL rating, or possibly a European rating similar to SNELL, like BSI or ECE. The Snell Memorial Foundation has been testing helmets for improved safety since 1957. Every 5 years they update their testing procedures, and issue a new SNELL rating. The current production helmets will have a SNELL M2005 rating - M for Motorcycle and 2005 for the year of the last update - the next generation of helmets will be SNELL M2010. Manufacturers are not required to submit helmets to Snell for testing - it is up to the manufacturers to decide if they want them tested. Another area that makes a difference in price is the ventilation system - something you want to look for in a helmet, especially in Arizona. Most helmets have vents on the forehead area, the chin bar, and on the back of the helmet. If you are looking at a lower end helmet, take a second and look inside the helmet at the ventilation ports. To help keep costs down, lower end helmet companies will buy someone else's old helmet shell molds, modify them a bit and make their own helmets. The problem is, sometimes the holes in the helmet shell don't line up with the holes inside the helmet liner - thus blocking all ventilation. Other times the holes are very tiny, and won't flow enough air. On higher end helmets, they have thoroughly tested the ventilation systems to offer the best possible airflow through the helmet, making it more comfortable to ride in the hotter climate.

Shell composite will also make a large impact on the cost of a helmet. The cheaper helmets are made with polycarbonate (plastic) shells, while most high end helmets are made with fiberglass, carbon fiber, or blends of similar materials, thus making a stronger and lighter helmet.

Warranty, removable liner systems, better graphics and of course, name recognition all figure into the price of a helmet. Like anything in life, the same rule applies here - you get what you pay for. But does that mean everyone that walks in our store needs an \$800 helmet? No. It means that there is a helmet that's right for everyone depending on their needs, and their budget. What works for the racers, may not work for the daily commuter, or the long distance traveler. Every rider has different criteria for their "perfect helmet". We can help you find the right helmet for your type of riding, and within your price range with just a few simple questions - please feel free to call or stop in for assistance, because riding with the wrong helmet can really take the fun out of riding.

Be safe out there - David from The Helmet Center