

Safety Riding Tip

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Proper Helmet Fitment - Are you in the right size helmet?

One of the most common things we see here at the Helmet Center is people wearing the wrong size helmets. Some have been riding for years, while others are newer riders, and some are shopping for their first helmet. Whether they walk in the door with a helmet, or have never tried one on, the biggest error we see is people choosing helmets that are too large. Left to shop on their own, 99% of the people choose a helmet that is at least one size too big, and about 60% of them choose one that is two sizes too big. There are a multitude of reasons why you want your helmet to fit correctly.

The first is safety - helmets that are too large tend to come off in an accident, usually on the first impact, leaving your head exposed as you continue to tumble and slide. If it does stay on, the open space around your head gives the helmet a running start at your head every time it contacts something solid, thus diminishing its ability to absorb the impact. If your helmet is properly fit, your head will stay planted inside, and the EPS liner inside the shell will absorb the energy, protecting you from injury.

The second is noise - helmets that are too large leave gaps around your head allowing air (noise) to flow past your ears. Not only can the sound be annoying, but it can be damaging to your hearing, and impair your ability to hear things around you. Also, if you have a communication system, this can make it very hard to understand the audio coming through the speakers.

The last is helmet movement - helmets that aren't a snug fit will lift at speed, causing neck fatigue and frustration, that can take the enjoyment out of your ride. And for a passenger that is always looking around a rider's head, or looking at the scenery to the side, helmet fitment is that much more crucial to a comfortable ride. A proper fit should allow you to look around side to side at triple digit speeds (where legal of course) without your helmet moving to the left or right as the wind presses on it.

So how do I get such a fit? Well, for starters, take your time. Sounds obvious, but we see people put on a helmet for 10 seconds, jerk their head a couple times and say "its good, I'll take it". To give a helmet a fair shake, you need to fasten the chin strap, and wear it for 5-10 minutes. While you have it on, be conscious of how the helmet fits to your head on all 4 sides, and on the top. Think of how well your ears fit into the padding, and how well you can see your peripheral vision through the eye port. You want a snug feeling all the way around, especially in the cheek pads, as these are what keep the helmet from moving side to side at speed. As a general rule, you shouldn't be able to chew gum in a new helmet because you would bite your cheeks. The helmet usually breaks in about 3-4% on the top liner, and about 15-20% in the cheek pads. Remember to take this into consideration, as most people errantly buy for the size it is now, and not the size it WILL be when it breaks in. If you wear prescription glasses or sunglasses, make sure they fit comfortably inside. Walk to a mirror and look at your face closely. Grab the chin bar of the helmet and twist your head to the left and right as you pull the helmet the opposite direction. The skin of your cheeks and forehead should move with the helmet. If the cheek pads separate from your cheeks, its too large. Next grab the back edge of the helmet and try and pull the helmet off - obviously its shouldn't come off. After a few minutes, remove the helmet in front of the mirror, and look at the skin on your forehead and cheeks - if after 30 seconds red spots start to develop, these could be signs the helmet may be too small, or the wrong shape for your head. Go back to the available helmets, and pick another one and start over.

Finally, after you have decided on a particular helmet, do yourself the favor of trying on the next smaller size of that helmet - I always have someone try on smaller and smaller helmets until they are feeling excessive pressure, then work my way back up. It helps someone realize how much tighter they can go than they thought. These tips will never replace being properly fit by an expert, but they will get you closer than you were before if there is no one there to assist you with your purchase. Feel free to call or stop by if you have any questions, or would like to be fit for a new helmet - we might even be able to re-fit the helmet you already have. Now get off the couch, go grab that helmet you've been wearing and see if YOU have the right size!



Be safe out there - David from The Helmet Center