

Top 10 Tips on Choosing a Helmet

Most of people struggle when choosing a helmet, and not just about the colour! Although style is important to many, you should choose a helmet that fits the best. But how can you tell if one is better than the other? After much research and years of experience buying for me and selling professionally to others I have come up with top 10 tips for helmet buyers.

1. Buy The Best You Can Afford! Bell Helmets motto of old "You don't have a \$30 head so why buy a \$30 helmet" is as true today as it was in 1978. So buy the best you can afford. The higher the value the higher the specification and you will know the international safety standards are more likely to have been exceeded by a greater margin. Most big helmet manufacturers have a range of models and anything from their mid-range up should be the ones you are starting from.

2. Get the Right Helmet Shape for You! Choose a helmet manufacture that makes helmets to suit your head shape! Everyone has a different head shape, but there are two main types - Round, and Long. Round head types fit best in HJC, AGV, Caberg, whilst Long type had fit best in Shoei helmets. Uniquely Arai helmets seem to fit everyone - but at a premium price!

3. Crown Fit Should Be Right! Concentrate on the crown and brow area of the head when assessing fit. If you get this wrong the helmet will either be too small or too big. The fit should be comfortable, without too much pressure, and you should just get your finger, up to but no more than, your fingernail in the brow area at the front of the helmet. If you cannot get your finger in at all, the helmet is too small and you will experience horrific headaches after a time.

4. Cheek Fit Must Be Right For You! Some helmets have expansive cheek protection. This is to help save you cheekbones from breaking should you have a 'get-off'. Some people like them but they can make others feel enclosed and uncomfortable. If you are one of these check that the cheek padding is not removable.

5. Change Your Helmet Regularly! Plan to change your helmet every 3 to 4 years, even if there are no obvious signs of damage or wear. This is because the shell material, no matter what it is made of, deteriorates in sunlight. It is actually attacked by UV A and B rays - the same radiation that burns your skin. Over time this makes the material brittle and less resistant to splitting under pressure - obviously to be avoided. The other reason is that the lining (if non-removable) and retaining strap can be contaminated with skin oil and sweat - again making them less effective under tension, and allowing the helmet to move around and in some extreme cases actually to come off!

6. Choose Neutral Colours! Many riders and pillion buy the current hot race replica or a 'loud' graphic that matches their current bike, and then change their bike and are left with a horrendous colour clash. Avoid this problem by buying a helmet colour that is neutral, but still allows you to be seen on the road. Red, Yellow, Light-Blue, Silver, Titanium, Anthracite and Graphite are all popular colours, as is White (but more difficult to get), and go with anything, as is Black - but at the expense of visibility.

7. Buy from a reputable source! With the advent of the thieves bazaar called eBay, every dodgy trader in the world can dump stolen, damaged or recalled goods onto an unsuspecting public. Don't be caught out by the lure of a cheap

deal, check out the source properly - try to speak to the seller before parting with cash, and judge if they are legitimate. One test of this is if they will take the helmet back and give you a refund if you don't like it. Most 'fly-by-night' characters avoid committing to this - but in the UK it is the law if returned within 7 days of purchase so don't be put off. The best way to buy is in a recognised helmet dealer. You can try on a selection, checking fit each time and most dealers will negotiate on price - at least a little. He (or she) will want you as a return customer - so will spend time with you to make sure you are satisfied.

8. Avoid Physical Damage! Seems obvious doesn't it, but the amount of times I have been asked to supply broken visor mechanisms, vent openings, new linings is countless. Keep your helmet safe when not wearing it, in its helmet bag or higher spec. case. Avoid opportunities that allow your helmet to be chipped or dropped. Don't lay your helmet on the bike seat, or on narrow benches, stone walls, etc. Lay it on the ground if need be. Dropping helmets is bad for them, but don't write a helmet off unless there is obvious shell damage. Usually dropping them from waist height does no damage. Chipping the shell is usually just unsightly, but if the gel coat is penetrated some helmets can actually allow water in - time for a change if this happens!

9. Keep Your Helmet Clean! Clean the inside regularly. Some helmets have removable linings - a great idea, but sometimes fiddly to get back in - and always wash them by hand - washing machines can rip them. Clean the lining (if not removable) and retaining strap with a 'helmet sanitizer' or even some car dry clean foam - but if you have sensitive skin avoid this latter stuff and go for the proper helmet formula to avoid rashes.

10. Replace After Any Kind of Contact With The Road At Speed. Lastly always, always change your helmet if you have any kind of contact with the road at speed. Unseen damage can be sustained which can compromise the safety of the helmet if you were to come off again, especially if the helmet was to hit the road in the same spot. Much larger forces would potentially be transmitted to the wearer that would otherwise be absorbed by the helmet shell and lining. This unseen damage can lead to cranial damage that would otherwise have been avoided if the helmet was changed. Don't compromise on safety - your life is too valuable!

Ride Safe

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