

APRIL IS CHECK YOUR HELMET MONTH

Follow the manufacturer's care instructions for your helmet. Use only the mildest soap recommended. Avoid any petroleum-based cleaning fluids, especially if you own a polycarbonate helmet. Exposure to strong cleaning agents can cause the helmet to decompose and lose protective value.

Keep your helmet's face shield clean. Normally, mild soap and water with a soft cloth will do the job. If it gets scratched, replace it. A scratched face shield can be difficult to see through. At night, it could dangerously distort your vision and your view of oncoming lights.

A helmet looks tough and sturdy, but it should be handled as a fragile item. This means that you don't want to drop your helmet onto hard surfaces. It could ruin your helmet. Remember that its function is to absorb impacts.

It is not wise to store helmets near gasoline, cleaning fluids, exhaust fumes, or excessive heat. These factors can result in the degradation of helmet materials, and often the damage goes unnoticed by the wearer. Read the information that comes with the helmet so you know how to care for it.

Definitely read the instructions about painting, decorating, pinstriping, or applying decals to your helmet. Never hang your helmet on the motorcycle's mirrors, turn signals, or backrest. The inner liner can easily be damaged from such handling. In fact, avoid carrying a spare helmet on your motorcycle, unless it's well protected or on your passenger's head. Even the bumps and jarring from normal riding can damage a spare. If it is strapped near hot engine parts or exhaust pipes, the inner liner may distort or melt at the hot spot. The outer shell may not show the damage, but if you've seen the effects of a foam drink cup placed too near excessive heat, you can understand what happens.

When you take your helmet off, find a flat, secure place for it. You could set it on the ground, secure it on a rack, or stow it on a shelf. On some bikes, putting it on the fuel tank may expose it to fumes. If you place it on the seat, make sure it won't fall off. If you plan to use a CB radio when you ride, find a model that doesn't require drilling speaker holes in the outer shell. Before you purchase your speakers, check with your state's laws regulating their use in helmets. Some states prohibit them.

Replacing Your Helmet

Replace your helmet if it was involved in a crash; it probably absorbed some impact shock. Some helmet manufacturers will inspect and, when possible, repair a damaged helmet. If you drop your helmet and think it might be damaged, take advantage of this service.

Most helmet manufacturers recommend replacing your helmet every two to four years. If you notice any signs of damage before then, replace it sooner.

Why replace your helmet every few years if it doesn't appear damaged? Its protective qualities may deteriorate with time and wear. The chin strap may fray or loosen at its attaching points; the shell could be chipped or damaged. The best reason is that helmets keep improving. Chances are that the helmet you buy in a couple of years will be better – stronger, lighter, and more comfortable – than the one you own now. It might even cost less!

Can't remember when you bought your present helmet? Check the chin strap or permanent labeling. Since 1974, all helmets must have the month and date of production stamped on it. If there's no date at all, you should definitely replace your helmet – now!