

APPAREL PRO: LEATHER JACKETS

There's no doubt about it, leather motorcycle jackets are cool. Models, military and non-motorcyclists alike are wearing our jackets. The new wave of scramblers and cafe racer-style bikes make leather motorcycle jackets even trendier, with riders wanting to capture the iconic style of days-gone-by in modern-day threads.

Form and function have given us many great technological advancements in motorcycle protective apparel today, yet I am noticing a disturbing trend towards fashion over function. Many leather jackets these days either do not offer armor, or are so "distressed" to give the antique look, that they'll be ineffectively protective in a crash. Worse, many have pockets for armor which is sold separately, which is then often dismissed due to budget.

How do we take care of our customers when a simple leather jacket can range from \$80 to \$800? By educating your staff on the features and benefits of each brand. All apparel manufacturers that I know of have some type of dealer training available. If they don't, and you like the brand, consider requesting training higher up the manufacturer's food chain (perhaps you have a lazy rep). If they don't offer training, and you are unhappy with the brand, it may be a good excuse to drop their line.

Shoppers love the feel of supple leather, yet these softer feeling jackets are often made from pig, goat or lamb skin. Leave these to the fashion sellers and department stores and dress your customers with cow, buffalo or kangaroo leather, which are the most protective. Learn about the tanning process, too, because these animal hides have to be processed before being turned into garments, and tanning is another area of great diversity.

The chemicals used in the tanning process will determine the longevity of the leather. Grain is another factor in cost, feel and abrasion resistance, and whether it's finished split-grain, top-grain or full-grain naked leather will affect the garment's strength and abrasion resistance. Get to know the basics, and your team can serve your customers well.

Small details can make a big difference, so carefully check the options for armor, venting, clasps and finishing touches. Softer leather can be used on collars and non-abrasion points to give a refined appearance and feel. If it's a vented or air-flow piece, be sure to check and make sure there is no unfortunate placement of perforations, such as in the abrasion zones.

Once we're educated in terms of leather quality, stitching, perforations and protections, then we can talk to our customers effectively. If your favorite apparel manufacturer has an item in their lineup that doesn't match the quality level you see for your customers and for yourself, then let them know. Tell the rep, or better, tell the manufacturer directly. Call their customer service line or their sales manager. After all, feedback fuels the next round of product innovations. ✍



Harley-Davidson Capitol Leather Jacket: MSRP \$455



The "Art of the Motorcycle Jacket" has been taken to a new level with Ace Cafe's Leather Collection. Iconic, classic and comfortable, these leathers have been designed to provide riders true motorcycle function and protection while also offering modern fashion-forward designs.