

# APPAREL PRO: OPEN FACE HELMETS

A tribute to daring days of yesteryear, open-face helmets have become quite popular in today's marketplace, and all the major helmet companies are producing them. Renewed interest in what was the most common form of helmet through and into the 1970s (when full-face helmets came into existence), has led to an incredible range of graphics. Today's helmets are a far cry from the "pudding bowl" of the 1930s and 1940s.

Helmets are now considered the most important safety items we have for our sport today, but that wasn't always the case. Early motorcycles were essentially bicycles with an engine mounted on them, and early era riders didn't see much of a need for helmets. It wasn't until these motorcycles started to achieve faster speeds – and unfortunately more people started getting hurt – that the idea of a protective helmet began to take form.

Dr. Eric Gardner was the first person to fashion a protective helmet that was more than the original leather caps. After treating frequent head traumas from a motorcycle racetrack near where he worked, Gardner presented his designs to the Auto-Cycle Union. Initially rejected, and lobbied against by the riders, with time, protection finally did become obligatory for these riders due to the large numbers of concussions.

And so it came to be that in 1914 Dr. Gardner set off to the Isle of Man TT with 94 canvas and shellac helmets he had designed and created. The testimony for better protection was in the proof: no concussions were reported that year thanks to the new helmets the riders were wearing. In fact, at least one life was saved due to this new-style helmet, thus cementing the case in the eyes of the racers and the regulators alike.

Beyond racing, motorcycle head protection for military and civilian use really didn't take off until the untimely death of T. E. Lawrence. Known as Lawrence of Arabia, British war hero Lawrence suffered serious head injuries when he crashed his Brough Superior SS100 and passed away after six days in a coma. It was Dr. Hugh Cairns, a neurosurgeon attending to Lawrence and deeply affected by the tragedy, who began the research that led to the use of crash helmets by both military and civilian motorcyclists.

Open-face helmets were the norm through the 1960s. Fiberglass shells with cork linings became popular and offered more protection but still left riders vulnerable to face and jaw injuries. It wasn't until the 1970s that chin protection was added to motorcycle helmets. From there, helmet protection technology has advanced exponentially, leading us to the most recent developments in MIPS technology. And this is something to smile about, with or without a chin bar. ↙



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