

# APPAREL PRO: OFF-ROAD HELMETS

There are a lot of helmet companies competing for business in the motorcycle industry today. So how does a brand get the message out about its product? How does a company compete against the other brands and claim their corner of the marketplace? One way is through product sponsorships. For helmet manufacturers, athlete sponsorships are a two-way street: in addition to the product visibility, they receive valuable feedback in order to continually improve their product.

"There are two things you get out of sponsoring a rider," said Edward Wilkinson, director of development at Scorpion Sports. "One is if you have a respected rider like Colton Haaker, people see him wearing it and think, 'If it's good enough for Colton, it's good enough for me.' Second is that Colton gives us feedback as to how to make future products better."

Professional athletes often have their helmets on for periods of time much longer than consumers, so they're intimate with the comfort and fit of the product. Their feedback is an extremely important part of the helmet development process. It gives developers ideas of how to make the product better in the future in a wide variety of environments and conditions.

Product input can also come from unexpected sources. Scorpion's VX-R70 is currently being used by a pilot of an ultralight aircraft. With the horsepower-to-weight ratio being so low, ultralight flying is a sport in which every pound counts. Using a wholly different environment, yet with extreme conditions similar to off-road riding, Scorpion is able to take that "off-label" feedback and apply it to future product development.

Regardless of which racer is wearing which helmet, fit should be the number one selling item for any helmet. If the helmet doesn't fit right, then you're doing the customer a disservice. If it's too tight it's going to be uncomfortable; if it's too loose, it could potentially be dangerous. Have the customer try on the helmet and walk around the store for 15-20 minutes to get an idea of how it's going to feel for the long term.

Whenever Scorpion is trying out a new mold for a helmet, their team will often put a helmet on for three or four hours and go about their business at their desks. While it isn't real-world riding testing, it will give them the measure of a helmet and let them know if there are any hotspots or interior design flaws before they send the helmet into production.

"You can have the best graphic in the world, the best ventilation, but if it doesn't fit right, then you're selling the customer the wrong helmet. If it's too big or there are going to be hotspots, it's the wrong helmet. Getting the right helmet on the customer I think is the most important job of the salesperson, and that's something that just can't be done by mail order," said Wilkinson. ✍



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*While Scorpion conducts many real-world tests with pro riders, the company also encourages employees to try out the prototypes for 3-4 hours at their desk to find any trouble spots before production. Below, Scorpion CEO Frank Esposito puts his money where his mouth is at his desk!*

