

# APPAREL PRO: LEATHER JACKETS

Every year I say this is the best year ever for motorcycling and powersports...and it's so true every year. The technological advancements of the machines, the increased effectiveness of helmets and head protection, as well as across the board development of better and better armor and safety protection make our sports more fun and more safe. It's truly an exciting time to play with horsepower.

Textile innovations are rapidly advancing as well, so amidst all of the new fabrics with custom-crafted trade names, it's fun to see that there's still such great interest in good ole leather. Great protection, longevity of use, and legends like Marlon Brando and Steve McQueen sporting them has made leather both cool and culturally obsessive.

Even with the Hollywood hype, leather motorcycle jackets do have their practical side. Leather is still hands-down the most protective material for abrasion resistance, even more so than the now nearly ubiquitous Kevlar. That's why motorcycle racers always don leather from neck to toe. One-piece leather suits, made from kangaroo or cow skin, have the ability to keep riders safe even when crashing at speeds in excess of 200 mph.

Thanks to the vintage and cafe racer movement, there's a lot of demand for stylish yet protective leather apparel right now. Perfect for folks looking for that fashion element but wanting to stay safe, the newer developed jackets incorporate a lot of the features from the textile side of the marketplace yet offer that quintessential leather biker look.

Long-time textile line Olympia entered the leather marketplace last year with both men's and women's jackets. "We had a lot of requests for vintage and cafe racer looking apparel and it seemed like a good fit for us," said Jeff Laird, national marketing manager at MTA Distributing. "We've taken Olympia technology and put it into a leather jacket with great looks and all the safety features that are part of the Olympia brand."

If your dealership is located in one of the warmer climates and your riders are looking for warm weather leather riding jackets, both vented and perforated versions exist. Venting is good because you can close vents in the rain, but the downside is that the jacket is still heavy and thick. Perforated leather jackets are more common, the outer shell having punched holes through which air flows in to the rider.

Know that perforations weaken the leather, so when stocking apparel for your dealership, be sure that the leather jackets on your hangers don't have cooling perforations in the places where riders might need abrasion protection. Perforations should only be located where the integrity of the leather isn't vital, never in the elbows, forearms or backs of jackets.

Combining the durability of leather with ventilation and stylish good looks? It is true. This is the best year yet to be a powersports aficionado. ✍



**Above:** The Highway 21 Gasser Jacket gives the look of a vintage jacket while featuring today's safety technology.

**Below:** Olympia has entered the leather marketplace with vintage and cafe racer looks for men and women.

