

For those of you who've never had a crash and have gotten a little lazy about your protective riding gear, let's look at it from a real-world perspective.

Picture yourself wearing street clothes on a hot summer day: shorts, sandals, and a T-shirt. Now imagine yourself in the back of a pickup truck with the tailgate down. You're lying on the tailgate, your body perpendicular to the road. You're probably three or four feet in the air and the ground beneath you is made of asphalt. The asphalt's plenty warm in the summer sunshine.

Now close your eyes and imagine rolling out of the back of the truck onto the ground. If the truck's not moving, it's probably not a huge deal-you can use your hands, back, shoulders, butt, or whatever to cushion the fall. But even at 0 mph, you could still land awkwardly, maybe banging your elbow or knee or scrape some skin. Either way, you wouldn't want to just roll out of the truck. You'd probably rather stand up and jump out so you can land on your feet. (Riders on motorcycles are rarely given the choice whether to roll or land on their feet. When the bike tumbles, the rider usually tumbles too. So picture yourself rolling out of the truck onto the ground.)

Now, what if you had to do this with the truck moving at 5 mph? At this point, you'd opt for some more clothing: blue jeans, a denim shirt, some high-top shoes, and maybe some knee and elbow pads, just to be on the safe side. How do you feel about your pretty face? Want anything for that?

Now think about trying this stunt at 15 mph. The shoes are probably still sufficient, but now street clothes might not stay put. You don't want your shirt riding up and letting your bare back or belly hit the pavement. Might be time to consider getting something that's made for tumbling on pavement, like leather. You're probably thinking about a pair of gloves, too, and definitely knee and elbow pads. (I fell on my hands and knees a lot when I was a kid. I seem to remember it hurt like hell.) Protecting your head with your hands might be difficult-time to don a little headgear, do you think?

How do you feel about 30 mph? That's pretty fast. At this point you definitely want a second skin. A throwaway layer. Covering your arms, legs, torso, feet, and hands. Good leather, too. Thick leather. Not that lightweight crap they sell at clothing stores. You want motorcycle-specific clothing, something that'll last for several seconds of crashing.

At 30 mph, you're probably second-guessing your desire to leave the relative safety of the moving vehicle. Your brain is backpedaling. Maybe you can get the driver to slow down to about 5 mph again? Is there a good reason to be doing this? Keep imagining:

Wind that truck up to 60 mph. Feel the wind in your hair? Nice, isn't it? It's only nice if you get to stay in the truck--or on your bike. The world doesn't work like that, though-nobody chooses the worst case. If you fall off, you're sure to get hurt without a good layer of gear. Now you want the works: full coverage, durable material, padding at the shoulders, elbows, forearms, hips, and knees--all the pointy places. You'll also want something to protect your spine and your head. I want sturdy boots and thick, sturdy gloves. You're searching desperately for some soft-looking asphalt.

And so it goes. The higher the speed, the longer you'll tumble, or the harder you'll hit whatever it is you're tumbling towards. To survive a fall from a bike at any speed without injury, you need a second skin. Even at 5 mph, you can change your good looks forever.

Think about it. Pat Hahn

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