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What Gear Are You In?

Take a moment to picture yourself in shorts, sandals, and a T-shirt on a blistering hot summer day. Now imagine you're lying on the tailgate of a pickup truck. You're three or four feet in the air and the ground beneath you asphalt.

Now, imagine rolling off the tailgate onto the ground.

At zero mph, it's going to hurt a little bit, but you can use your hands, back, shoulders, butt, or whatever to cushion the fall. If you land just right, you'll only bang your elbow or knee or scrape some skin. Rethinking the whole maneuver, most people would probably rather stand up and jump out so they could land on their feet.

(Hint: 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 humor me and picture yourself actually rolling out of the truck onto the ground, okay?)

Now rolling out of the back of the truck at 5 mph. You might opt for some clothing: blue jeans, a denim shirt, some high-top shoes, and maybe some knee and elbow pads, just to be on the safe side. Got your face covered?

Think about trying this same stunt at 15 mph. The shoes are probably still sufficient, but street clothes might not stay put. You don't want your shirt riding up and using your stomach or back to slow you down. 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

You may want the works: full coverage, durable material, padding at the shoulders, elbows, forearms, hips, and knees—all the pointy places. You might also want something to protect your spine and your head. Don't forget sturdy boots and thick, sturdy gloves.

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. There's a reason motorcycle racers can often walk away from 100-mph crashes more embarrassed than hurt: they care as much about the gear they wear as they do the bike they ride. If you want to walk the motorcyclist walk, and talk the motorcyclist talk, you're going to want to wear the motorcyclist wear.

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might be difficult—consider donning a little headgear.

And so far, we're only up to 15 mph. How do you feel about 30? That's pretty fast. That's 44 feet per second, and you might want a second skin. A throwaway layer. Covering your arms, legs, torso, feet, and hands. Good stuff, too. Thick. Not that lightweight crap they sell at clothing stores. You want motorcycle-specific clothing, something that'll last for several seconds of crashing.

Run that truck up to 60 mph. Sitting in the back of the truck, it's oddly a similar sensation to a bike at 60. Feel the wind in your hair? Nice, isn't it? It's nice if you get to stay in the truck—or on your bike. If you fall off, you're sure to get hurt without a good layer of gear.



If you had to tumble from a moving vehicle, how would you dress for the jump? Would your clothing reflect the weather that day, or the worst-case scenario? There's merit to the saying, "Dress for the slide, not the ride." Photo courtesy Evans Brasfield.

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