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Riding the Wave

Deep in the conscience of the motorcycle community, there's this irrepresible urge to raise your left arm, move your left hand back and forth, to and fro, or up and down, and commit some sort of outwardly friendly maneuver in the direction of an oncoming motorcyclist. What's really great about this urge is that you almost always get a similar gesture "right back atcha." This is the motorbike wave.

It comes in many forms: a subtle glance, quick nod, gloved-palm flashback, gotcha-pointed finger, howdy-peace sign, rock-and-roll devil fingers, down-low wrist-flipper, and sometimes, the granddaddy of all waves, the "both-hands-in-the-air-roller-coaster-Homer-Simpson-WOO-HOO!" wave. Riders do this because they're out having fun on a vehicle only one in ten people know how to ride—and they've just seen another one-in-ten person. There's a bond there, a secret you share, and you can't help but acknowledge it with a little flash of greeting. In a great big world where everyone's going their millions of different ways, you and that other person have something in common—more in common than you do with most of your acquaintances. That person could end up being a lifelong friend, if you ever met.

Half the riders out there will shoot you one of these gestures without being prompted, and you'll instinctively return the wave, completing the happy electric circuit. If you wave first, you'll probably get a return gesture three times out of four. Why don't they always wave back? Hard to say. Most likely, they're focused on the road or a particular hazard. (You don't have to be looking at someone to wave at them, you know!) They may be holding on for dear life (a nod would still be acceptable). They could be lost in thought (not the best time or place) or fiddling with something on their bike (what's so important down there?) and simply didn't see you. It's usually something like that.

However, there's always the chance that may not actually be riders: maybe they're squids or posers who aren't real motorcyclists and don't understand what riding is all really about, so they haven't developed the return-wave instinct. They're simply not riders, so they don't "get it." On rare occasions, it'll be worse than that: an elitist jackass who thinks that motorcycling is only about the bike or the protective gear (or lack thereof), ignoring the rider, the riding, and the road. Since you don't ride the way he or she does, you therefore have nothing in common.

(In those cases, you're better off without the wave.)

Pat Hahn is the author of *How to Ride a Motorcycle, Ride Hard Ride Smart*, and a co-author of *Track Day Handbook*. He lives in south Minneapolis. You can e-mail Pat at readerresponse@hedonistic-enthusiasm.com or visit his Web site at www.debaucheryball.org.

[PHOTO CAPTION] Photo courtesy Evans Brasfield.



Product Review – Casper's Leather

JD Conner

Leather just seems so right. Yeah, yeah, I know, human-made fiber and armor are better than leather at doing some of the jobs needed when you ride a bike. I even own a couple of those outfits. Nothing wrong with them, but for a lot of people, leather is the real deal. It's the look, the smell, the feel and the attitude.

This month I'm reviewing leather. Specifically, I'm reviewing leather chaps (and a brief mention of a couple of other products) from Casper's Leather. Why Casper's? I see the Casper's displays at a lot of bike shows and, more importantly, I've heard from riders that Casper's has quality products. So, off I go to see what the story is.

I tested a set of chaps, a cold weather/winter bomber hat and a wind blocking leather triangle. But, before we get into the products, a bit about Casper's is in order. What you get from the products is the result of the right attitude and processes at the company and the workers who put things together.

Bessie and Paul Casper started the business 25 years ago. They had a nice simple philosophy: make high quality leather products and guarantee them for as long as the customer owns them. The seven employees of Casper's operate out of Warba, MN (50 miles west of Duluth, MN) and use, exclusively, American leather from a tannery in Milwaukee. I interviewed Trish Casper for this review and was thrilled to see her measuring, fitting and sewing products for customers right on the spot at a bike show in Peotone, Illinois.

Reviewing chaps is a little tough because part of the deal when you buy chaps is hoping that they last a long, long time. So, I did the best I could. I wore them daily for three months (about 5,000 miles in heat, cold and rain). First, the fit was perfect (as it should be when you're measured and the leather is cut and sewn for your body). The medium weight leather was right for me. They've also got a heavier weight leather but it's really heavy and seemed too bulky for the feel that I want when I'm riding. There are a number of features that I like. The chaps have all brass zippers that have leather overlays so that there is never a fear of scratching the paint. Each leg is made of one piece of leather so they are more comfortable and they look better than the patchwork quilt look of some other chaps. Casper's uses double stitching to decrease the likelihood of the sewing coming undone (this is smart, since chaps get rough treatment at high speeds). The chaps have a four inch waist band that goes all around the waist so that, instead of braids or cords, there is a flat piece of leather that doesn't chafe or dig into your back when you lean over or against something. At the bottom of each leg of the chaps are four snaps that tighten each leg and cover the zipper.

These chaps fit and look great. At \$160, they give you good protection, a good feel and should last a lifetime. And at Casper's, if something ever does happen, they will fix it free and with a smile.

I'm running out of space, but I wanted to mention the bomber hat and the leather, wind blocker. Both products are perfect for riders who want to be on their bikes during the cooler months and like the feel and look of leather.



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