

BACK PROTECTORS

12 TESTED
£20-£95

One of these should form a vital part of your riding kit, but which is the best for you?

WORDS: OLIVER CRICK PICTURES: TOM CRITCHELL

NECK AREA

Try the protector on with your normal kit and sit on your bike to check it doesn't dig in.

SHOULDER STRAP

Should be adjustable for a comfy and secure fit.

ARTICULATED TYPE

Some protectors are made from separate plates which make it easier for you to move around.

WAIST BELT

Most adjust with Velcro. Check it does up tightly enough when you try the protector on.

PADDING

Improves comfort and helps protect vital organs, such as your kidneys, from impacts.

COCCYX AREA

The protector should come down far enough – but not be so long that it digs in. Remember, your leathers will have to fit comfortably around it.



WHY YOU CAN TRUST THE TRIANGLE

Some leathers and jackets come with pukka CE-marked back protectors built in, but all too often you just get a bit of soft foam – which isn't going to do much for you in a spill. That's why a separate back protector makes sense. Wearing one may not necessarily prevent a broken back, but a decent protector will lessen any impact and will help stop shoulder injuries as well as defending vital organs.

The testing system:

RiDE tests are devised by bikers and carried out by bikers. Where necessary we draft in expert help and even create special testing rigs if they are needed. We ensure that every test is fair and that products are rated on their merits – we're not interested in trendy brands, just whether something does a decent job. If it does, we say so. If it doesn't we'll be the first to let you know. Results are checked and rechecked then makers are given a chance to comment. Often firms will take a fresh look at products as a result of RiDE testing.

What the tags mean:

The Best Buy tag indicates that a product is not only good at the job it was designed for, but is excellent value for money. A Recommended tag means a product does a good job at a reasonable price. Look for the tags in the shops next time you're buying kit.

The tester:

RiDE's Oliver Crick is a former design engineer. He's devoted the last four years to evaluating biking products.



Oliver Crick
product tester

CLOVER BACK PRO

£60

CONTACT: 01384 413841

This one's easy to get on but can ride up if you are pulling on tight-fitting leathers. It's bulky at the lower back, a tad inflexible and gets hot on warm days. It's made from articulated foam blocks with padding on the inside, and features adjustable shoulder straps and a wide Velcro-fastening waistband. Good impact protection but the zone of protection is not as big as it should be according to its labelled size.



OVERALL RATING
19/30

PROTECTION: 8/10
CONSTRUCTION: 6/10
ROAD TESTING: 5/10

HELD ART9380

£60.80

CONTACT: 01283 820508

Fairly rigid foam construction with hard plastic to the outside and padding to the inside. The protector features adjustable shoulder straps and a wide, Velcro-fastening waistband. Gives above average impact protection but, for its size, it doesn't have a large enough zone of protection across the shoulders. It's reasonably easy to get leathers over and didn't interfere with riding.



OVERALL RATING
21/30

PROTECTION: 7/10
CONSTRUCTION: 6/10
ROAD TESTING: 8/10

BMW MOTORRAD

£95

CONTACT: 01652 680060

Our rider found it bulky around the chest/neck and coccyx areas, saying it was difficult to wear under leathers but fine under a fabric jacket. Has adjustable shoulder straps and a broad waistband. Excellent impact protection, but the width across the shoulder blades is less than it should be for the size of the protector. It's made from a hard plastic outer with foam padding.



OVERALL RATING
21/30

PROTECTION: 10/10
CONSTRUCTION: 6/10
ROAD TESTING: 5/10

HEIN GERICKE ARMOUR VEST

£59.99

CONTACT: 0800 165165

Consists of a zip-up nylon/lycra vest with an integral flexible foam protector. A crotch strap holds the protector in place – but our rider didn't find it that comfortable. The good news is that the back protector itself is fine. There's no adjustment, so make sure you buy the correct size. The Armour Vest performed well in our impact test but the zone of protection is a bit small at the top and bottom.



OVERALL RATING
21/30

PROTECTION: 8/10
CONSTRUCTION: 6/10
ROAD TESTING: 7/10

How we did it

Impact protection

Back protectors are supposed to meet the European EN 1621-2 standard to get a CE mark. We tested seven key points (including spine, kidney, shoulder blade and rib areas) to the same CE level. The test was done using a bar striker to simulate hitting a kerb. We measured how much force was transmitted through the back protector – the less force that got through, the higher the protection score.

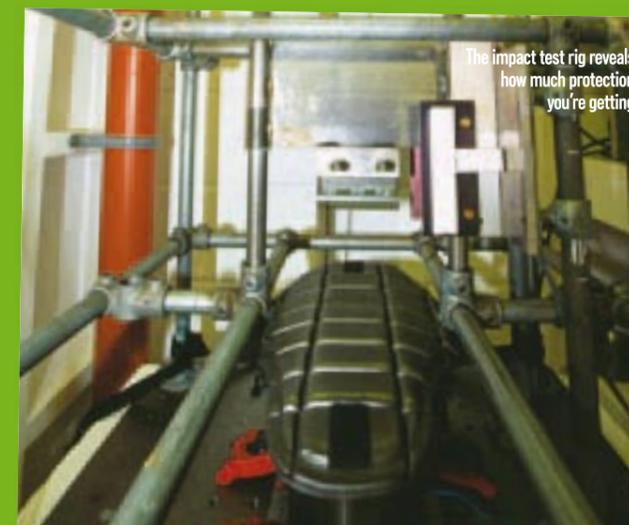
Construction

EN 1621-2 requires that back protectors be marked with the torso length (the distance between

the waist and the neck/shoulder junction). The standard also requires that the protectors cover a certain area known as the "zone of protection". Some of the protectors are smaller than the zone of protection they are supposed to offer and we marked them down accordingly.

Road testing

Each protector was worn for hundreds of miles to assess comfort, fit and how easy they are to get on and off etc. To make sure they're a practical year-round proposition, we checked if they were OK under a winter jacket too.



The impact test rig reveals how much protection you're getting

HEIN GERICKE HIPROTEC

£32.99

CONTACT: 0800 165165

If you're on the skinny side you should make sure you try this one on before you buy as there isn't a huge amount of Velcro overlap on the waist. It's made from a foam pad zipped into a nylon/lycra pocket with soft padding to the inside. It scored well for impact protection, but the zone of protection is a bit small at the top and bottom. Our rider found it a bit bulky at the coccyx.



OVERALL RATING
22/30

PROTECTION: 8/10
CONSTRUCTION: 6/10
ROAD TESTING: 8/10

DAINESE WAVE

£89.99

CONTACT: www.dainese.com

Above average impact protection from the Dainese Wave, but we found some of the outer shell plates can rotate, which limits protection in the lumbar region. The protector is made from sturdy plastic plates with foam backing. It has adjustable shoulder straps and a wide, Velcro-fastening waistband. Our rider found it light, comfortable and easy to get on with.



OVERALL RATING
24/30

PROTECTION: 7/10
CONSTRUCTION: 8/10
ROAD TESTING: 9/10

HEIN GERICKE BACK SHOCK

£19.99-£23.99

CONTACT: 0800 165165

This is the cheapest protector on test. It's designed to slot into a pocket in your jacket – once it's in you hardly notice it's there and, of course, you don't have to fiddle around with straps. It's made from foam with soft padding inside. Our rider found it comfortable and very easy to get on with. Gave a good impact protection performance but the zone of protection is too small at the top and the bottom.



OVERALL RATING
24/30

PROTECTION: 8/10
CONSTRUCTION: 6/10
ROAD TESTING: 10/10

KNOX STOWAWAY

£59.99

CONTACT: 01900 825825

The impact score is average, but it's consistent and the protector covers all the right areas. It's made from articulated blocks of foam with soft padding to the inside. Comes with adjustable shoulder straps and a wide waistband that does up with Velcro. Our rider found it comfortable, the only niggle being the ends of the shoulder straps which are loose in your jacket once you've adjusted them. Comes with a storage bag.



OVERALL RATING
25/30

PROTECTION: 5/10
CONSTRUCTION: 10/10
ROAD TESTING: 10/10

ALPINESTARS TECH BACK

£89.95

CONTACT: www.alpinestars.com

Our rider found this one really comfortable. The shoulder straps Velcro to the broad waistband and the articulated construction gives the protector plenty of flexibility. The impact scores were just above average, which is surprising for such a chunky-feeling protector. The construction is good and the zone of protection is right for the torso size – just make sure you buy the correct size (see left).



OVERALL RATING
26/30

PROTECTION: 6/10
CONSTRUCTION: 10/10
ROAD TESTING: 10/10

KNOX RICOCHET

£79.99

CONTACT: 01900 825825

Scored well for impact protection with decent cover for your shoulders and lower back. It's made from flexible foam with an articulated hard plastic outer. It's a tad stiff and leathers occasionally catch on it when you're putting them on and taking them off. You're always aware it's there under your leathers, too, but padding on the inside ensures comfort. A broad waistband and adjustable shoulder straps ensure a snug fit.



OVERALL RATING
26/30

PROTECTION: 9/10
CONSTRUCTION: 10/10
ROAD TESTING: 7/10

SPYKE BACK 7

£79.99

CONTACT: 01384 413841

No problems at all with road testing, except our rider felt it could cover more spinal area. The zone of protection was right but check you buy the right size to get the best protection. Good construction throughout means above average impact tests. It's made from articulated hard plastic on the outside with softer foam padding to the inner. Comes with adjustable shoulder straps and a wide, Velcro-fastening waistband.



OVERALL RATING
27/30

PROTECTION: 7/10
CONSTRUCTION: 10/10
ROAD TESTING: 10/10

DAVIES ODELL FORCEFIELD

£79.99

CONTACT: 01933 410818

Our rider was raving about the Forcefield, finding it flexible yet reassuringly solid. It's hard-wearing, made from foam with a flexible rubber material on the outside. A broad waistband and adjustable shoulder straps mean getting it on and off, and fitting leathers over it, is easy. Excellent impact testing, the results showing consistency throughout and great construction.



OVERALL RATING
29/30

PROTECTION: 10/10
CONSTRUCTION: 10/10
ROAD TESTING: 9/10

BACK PROTECTORS RESULTS

	PRICE	WEIGHT	PROTECTION /10	CONSTRUCTION /10	ROAD TEST /10	TOTAL /30
1 Davies Odell Forcefield	£79.99	925g	10	10	9	29
2 Spyke Back 7	£79.99	742g	7	10	10	27
3 Knox Ricochet	£79.99	1132g	9	10	7	26
3 Alpinestars Tech Back	£89.95	1064g	6	10	10	26
4 Knox Stowaway	£59.99	629g	5	10	10	25
5 Hein Gericke Back Shock	£19.99	209g	8	6	10	24
5 Dainese Wave	£89.99	609g	7	8	9	24
6 Hein Gericke Hiprotec	£32.99	458g	8	6	8	22
7 BMW Motorrad	£95	1017g	10	6	5	21
7 Hein Gericke Armour Vest	£59.99	546g	8	6	7	21
7 Held Art9380	£60.80	758g	7	6	8	21
8 Clover Back Pro	£60	546g	8	6	5	19

Manufacturers have their say...

All the manufacturers or importers had a chance to comment. Here's what they said:

Dainese "Dainese's Wave protector is used by the best MotoGP riders and is considered the best protection by European magazines such as Motorrad in Germany and Moto-magazine in France."

Hein Gericke "Excellent value with no compromise on safety. Our back protectors are CE approved and our staff are trained to help the customer select the best fit."

Knox "We're delighted that the Ricochet is Recommended. For 2005 it's even lighter and more flexible. No wonder Knox is so popular with British Superbike racers."

Davies Odell "Excellent protection, comfortable, unprecedented scoring, superb impact results. RIDE Best Buy. The verdict says it all."

Verdict

We couldn't really fault the Davies Odell Forcefield – just dropping one mark is unprecedented. It's comfortable, gives excellent protection and is well made too. At £79.99 it's not the cheapest out

there, but it's by no means the most expensive either.

Spyke's Back 7 and Knox's Ricochet also cost £79.99 and are Recommended. Both offer decent levels of protection and comfort with proper size labelling.

TOP TIPS BEFORE YOU BUY...

1 Get the right size and try on with your leathers before you buy. It mustn't make your leathers too tight or dig into your neck, helmet or lower back. Get a friend to help you measure from your waist to the point where your neck reaches your shoulders, this will tell you what size to buy. Take care, however, as we found the size on the label can be misleading. The protector shouldn't go above the base of your neck or below your coccyx.

2 If you're buying made-to-measure leathers, tell the suppliers you want space for a protector or wear your usual protector when you get measured – that way you'll know the two will work together.

3 Consider getting a new back protector if you're involved in an accident – at the very least you should inspect it for damage and remember that it's unlikely to give the same level of protection twice.

