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but is it worth £13,000?”*



SIT LIKE IT IS

7 cutting-edge
helmets tested
Are you ready to go radical?



August 2014 £4.10



USED GUIDE SUZUKI HAYABUSA FIRST RIDE HONDA F6C DIY LOSE WEIGHT

Outstanding gear examined in detail

MULTI-FUNCTION HELMETS

Where did this radically styled new breed come from, and are they anything more than a triumph of form over function?



Chin bars

There's no doubting the safety benefits of a full-face lid, but they can get very hot when you're off-roading or in stop-start traffic, and they inhibit communication. So how about a helmet that lets you flip the front to the back, or remove it altogether?

Peaks

Great at shielding you from the sun, often poor at speed. Hence quickly detachable peaks.

Goggles

Keep the air out of your eyes but let you enjoy a connection with the great outdoors.

BY COLIN OVERLAND

YOU NEVER USED to need a manual in order to operate your crash helmet. On or off. Open or closed. Clean or dirty. That was the limit of the complexity involved, whether it was full or open face.

But now your options are more complicated, and the lines have become blurred. People began using off-road lids on the road. Flip-fronts got better and more popular. There are open-face lids with visors and sides that almost meet around the front, and others with face masks that are virtually chin bars.

What's going on? Why now? And should we be rethinking our traditional attachment to a certain type of helmet?

Having tried out these seven examples it's fair to say that nothing here made us think we must immediately bin our

favourite full-face helmets. The traditional idea has continued to improve, especially in recent years as new materials have become available at a reasonable price.

But, that said, some of these radical new helmets offer a viable alternative. It's great to be able to use the same lid first as a full-face helmet on a cold, rainy Midlands morning, then flipping the sun visor down when the sun comes out, then converting it into an open-face to smell the glorious Alpine air a couple of days later.

Similarly, a BMW F800GS rider who travels to the south of Spain on fast roads will want a full-face helmet and visor for that stage of the trip, but when they tackle

some unsurfaced tracks they'll be much cooler and happier with peak and goggles. All this without having to carry a second helmet.

A quick word about our choice of helmets for this feature. We've not tried to be comprehensive. We've stuck to road-orientated helmets, although there are some interesting parallel developments in off-roading. We make no apology for including several Sharks. The French company are leading the field when it comes to offering radically different helmets. In fact, there were a couple more Sharks we could have included, but had to draw the line somewhere.

Our aim is to encourage you to think twice next time you replace your helmet. After all, plenty of bikers have changed their style of bike in recent years. Now, there are some intriguing alternative styles of helmet to choose from too. ➔

Shark Explore-R

Price from £320

Info www.nevis.uk.com

This turns from a conventional full-face to an adventure/off-road helmet thanks to a quickly detachable visor and rapidly attached peak and goggles. It also has a drop-down sun visor, although that doesn't operate when you're wearing the goggles. There's a wide aperture, similar to that on conventional Shark full-face helmets, so you can see well whether you're using the visor or goggles.

The shell is made of carbon aramid fibre and glassfibre – a proper sturdy motorcycle helmet, feeling much more substantial than the Raw and its variants (see below right). The interior is classy too, designed and made to Shark's usual high standards. And there are proper chin and scalp vents.

This is a brilliant response to the needs of adventure bike riders who spend most of their time on the road but who want to hit the dirt now and again, all with the same crash helmet.

- ✓ **Well designed, well made**
- ✗ **Awkward to carry the bits with you**



Quick-release goggles attach to side of Explore-R



Arai CT Ram

Price £430

Info www.whyarai.co.uk

Arai's image is all racetrack and sportsbike, but their wide range also includes a variety of open-face helmets, several of them with visors.

The most striking is this, the CT Ram. Its weirdness lies not in its ability to transform from one state to another – it doesn't do any of that. Rather, it stands out by being a peaked, visored, open-face helmet that has sides extended by 3cm, coming close to joining up at the front.



And – even more remarkably – it has a level of detail, ventilation and high-end construction more commonly associated with the range-topping RX-7 GP. A very classy and effective bit of kit.

- ✓ **Superb at anything less than three-figure speeds**
- ✗ **Not cheap – but it's every bit as trick as a full-face lid**

Shark Raw

Price from £190

Info www.nevis.uk.com

The stiff plastic face mask – which will protect you from stones, if not from crash injuries – clips into the goggles, and the goggles clip into the straps that remain on the side of the helmet. So you can ride it naked-faced, or with the goggles, or with the goggles and mask, giving a handy choice, depending on the weather and your likely speed. But who are we kidding – it's all



about the streetfighter/jet pilot styling.

Various accessories are also available: different coloured lenses, and patterned mouth guards – a camo design, a Union Jack and others.

- ✓ **Brilliant piece of design – it's the new-wave Simpson Bandit**
- ✗ **Goggle straps don't tidy away very well when not in use**



Givi X.01 Tourer

Price £170

Info www.givi.co.uk

This is the most versatile helmet here, showing that Givi can make more than just luggage and scooter helmets.

You can remove the peak, the visor and the chin guard, giving a variety of distinctly different options for how you wear the X.01 Tourer. It also comes with a drop-down sun visor that you can't remove. With everything in place it feels sturdy – but not too heavy – and looks very modern. It's not the quietest of helmets, though.

The chin bar is easy to remove (although the weatherproof plugs that slot in where the chin bar comes out feel a bit cheap). Chin bar off is the best mode: lots of fresh air, but the visor goes far enough down to protect you from the wind at anything up to motorway speeds. The peak and sun visor combine well to keep the sun out of your eyes, with no need for a dark visor.

Removing the visor and/or peak feels less worthwhile, leaving you with a fairly ordinary open-face or full-face helmet.

- ✓ **Full and open-face lid in one package**
- ✗ **Noisy, tricky to carry parts with you**

Shark Vancore

Price from £190

Info www.nevis.uk.com

The Vancore shares its shell shape with the Raw, but adds a fixed chin bar and a big injection of Star Wars styling.

It comes with fast-release goggles that, when in place, give a snug fit.

Like the Raw, the Vancore has decent ventilation for your scalp, and a sweat-defeating bamboo interior.

As with the Vantime (see right) this is made of injected thermoplastic resin, so it's light



and sleek, and legal, but falls some way short of the sturdier feel we've come to expect from motorcycle helmets. This sort of thing makes much more sense on a small bike or scooter in southern Europe.

- ✓ **Still stylish, with some extra protection from a fixed chin bar**
- ✗ **A conventional full-face helmet is more practical**

Shark Vantime

Price from £170

Info www.nevis.uk.com

Another variant on the Raw theme. This has a boldly protruding – but not very heavy-duty – fixed chin bar, and a huge, curvy visor that when lowered goes down inside the chin bar rather than resting on top of it.

There's also a drop-down sun visor, plus scalp vents and that bamboo lining.

As with the Raw, the Vantime is mostly about the styling, but



aimed at a different crowd. The Raw is for streetfighter riders, whereas this has much more of a retro scooter vibe. If Lady Penelope rode a '60s Vespa, she'd probably do so wearing one of these.

- ✓ **Reasonably practical, light**
- ✗ **Love-or-hate looks, not as sturdy as conventional full-face lids**

Shark Evoline

Price from £320

Info www.nevis.uk.com

You may be wondering what this is doing in a story about weird helmets. It's now in its third generation and an established favourite among some riders. But that familiarity shouldn't distract us from the fact that the Evoline has always been radically different in conception and excellent in execution.

Its fundamental difference is that it's equally at home as a full-face or open-face helmet. Unlike most other flip-front helmets, this front flips all the way round to the back, so you can ride along with the wind in your beard without any of the aerodynamic horrors that will hit conventional flip-fronts above a certain speed if ridden in the open position.

It's been tested and approved in both open and closed modes. Not a unique achievement, but still a noteworthy one. And the opening and closing can be done one-handed on the move in perfect safety.

The Evoline also has a drop-down sun visor, operated by a sliding knob on top of the helmet. The whole helmet is better ventilated, the aerodynamics are improved compared to previous Evolines, and the opening mechanism is simpler too.

- ✓ **All the helmets you need**
- ✗ **It's big and can look oddly shaped**



Chin bar lifts up and over, and sun visor can be slid down in either mode. Well ventilated too

But what if I want a normal helmet?

YOUR CHOICE OF conventional helmets has never been better, and from as little as £100 (or as much as £800) you can get a lid that's not just legal and protective but also comfortable and well ventilated.

We say it a lot, and we'll keep on saying it: fit is almost everything when it comes to crash helmets. Try several on, ideally while wearing your normal riding gear and sitting on your own bike.

Many manufacturers – Shoei, AGV and Arai for example – go to a lot of trouble to train dealers in helping you get the right fit, so don't be afraid to ask for help.

Here are some of the best.

Full face AGV GT Veloce from £330

www.agv.co.uk

Helmet companies may have diverted a lot of energy to adventure and flip-front designs, but AGV have not neglected the full-face lid. Go Arai if you can afford a bit more, look at HJC if your budget is lower, but this AGV is light and aerodynamically stable, with a quality feel.



Flip-front Shoei Neotech from £470

www.feridax.com

Quiet, comfortable, easy to operate and very light, with a drop-down sun visor. Also have a look at the BMW System 6 Evo and the various Schuberth flip-fronts, which include models specifically designed to suit female riders. HJC's IS-Max is a budget alternative.



Open face Davida from £240

www.davida.co.uk

There's a good choice of open-face helmets, with visors or with goggles, but the absolute masters are British firm Davida. Their ever-growing range has a near-infinite choice of finishes, and the quality is evident every time you put it on. You can pay more for a lesser product.



Adventure Shoei Hornet from £340

www.feridax.com

Designed for high-speed desert crossings, but also very practical in city traffic. It's comfortable and cool, and the peak doesn't force your head back when you're getting a move on. The Arai Tour-X4 is very similar in design and execution, but costs a little more.

