

Helite Leather Airbag Jacket



PHOTOS BY MARIORIE KLEIMAN

Right: The jacket inflated.
Top: The jacket in its normal state. **Bottom: Back view with airbags deployed.**

AS ITS NAME IMPLIES, Helite's latest leather jacket contains an integrated, mechanically actuated airbag, which deploys if the rider and motorcycle become forcefully separated. Essentially, the jacket has a tether which snaps onto a matching nylon buckled leash that is attached to the motorcycle. In the event the rider is ejected during an accident, the tether on the jacket is violently pulled, activating a spring-loaded piston, which punctures an on-board 60cc CO₂ cartridge. The released gas then inflates the jacket's internal chambers, protecting the vital organs from the chest and ribcage down to the hips. The gas also inflates an integrated neck roll, preventing neck hyperextension. Incredibly, this whole process takes less than 0.1 second!

Quality of construction and materials is superlative. The outer shell is 1.3mm full-grain cowhide leather, while the interior has a conventional polyester liner. A full armor suite is included, with a large SAS-TEC back protector and Knox pads for the shoulders and elbows. The collar features a soft neoprene edge with a hook-and-loop closure, and the wrists have traditional metal snaps. Main entry is via a large YKK zipper, and accordion stretch paneling on the sides and elbows allows plenty of freedom of movement.

Storage comes courtesy of two hand-warmer pockets and a chest pocket on the exterior, supplemented by two more pockets on the interior for smaller items. Overall, this Helite looks for all the world like the quintessential "classic black motorcycle jacket," including areas of tastefully perforated leather on the forearms and upper back.

On the road, the Helite is supremely comfortable, with a slim-fitting European cut and elegant styling that drew compliments from other riders. Inevitably, the curious wanted me to demonstrate the inflation process, but at \$25 per gas canister, showing off gets expensive! After triggering the canister, the jacket self-discharges the gas within approximately 5 minutes. A hex key is included for the simple task of canister replacement. Don't worry about accidentally triggering the canister—the pull required on the tether is very heavy, not something that a rider can typically do by getting off the bike and forgetting to unbuckle it.

This is definitely a winter, spring and fall jacket. A removable quilted polyester insulation layer is included for cold weather riding, and it was effective from 50 degrees to below freezing during our test regimen. However, other than some small panels on the underarms and across the top of the back, there is no true mesh venting on this jacket, so it's not ideal for hot summer rides of 80 degrees or warmer.

The only downside is the zippers used for the external pockets, all of which are the diminutive civilian jacket variety. Although they are sturdy YKK units, they are entirely too small to be used with riding gloves on. No extra zipper pulls are included either, so plan on removing your gloves for anything involving the pockets.

Ultimately, zipper niggles aside, the Helite Leather Airbag Jacket represents a very compelling proposition that combines contemporary styling and potentially life-saving technology in one high-quality garment. It comes in men's and women's sizes S-4XL and retails for \$999. Helite also offers airbag vests and adventure-styled jackets.

—MOSHE K. LEVY 

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