

Helmets and Riding Lessons, by Mark Caldwell

Two recent news stories really bring home the importance of proper training and proper riding gear. The most recent, is [an article in the Seattle P-I](#) dated May 10, 2005 about the Cleveland Browns Tight End, Kellen Winslow, Jr. The opening paragraph reads

Browns tight end Kellen Winslow Jr. was released from the hospital Tuesday, nine days after a motorcycle accident left him with internal injuries and a damaged right knee.

But more telling is the last sentence which states, “Winslow, 21, bought a powerful motorcycle last month and had a learner's permit, but **ignored advice about getting lessons.**” (emphasis added).

That pretty well speaks for itself. I believe every rider in our chapter is properly licensed and has had some initial lessons. Let's all remember to also take some refresher courses like the ERC (Experienced Rider Course) on a regular basis!

The [second news story](#) was from a couple of weeks ago, about Kelly and Candi Johnson, a father and daughter who died in a motorcycle crash April 23rd on Highway 18. I had heard at the time that their helmets had come off and led to more severe head trauma. I cannot find any confirmation of that in the articles available online, and so it may have been speculation on someone's part. Nonetheless, it raises a good opportunity to remind everyone to check their helmets.

Make sure your helmet fits properly. You can no longer tell that a helmet is too large by shaking your head side-to-side. Any helmet with decent cheek pads will resist spinning, but that doesn't mean it is the right size. Get your head measured and then pick the right size helmet for the size of your head. And be sure to get one from a quality manufacturer, and preferably has been independently tested, such as by the Snell Foundation. Snell tests many aspects of the helmet, including the chin strap and connecting hardware to make sure it won't likely fail in an accident causing the helmet to come off. The last I heard, the Double-D ring is still the most secure method of connecting the straps. Some people don't like this design for various reasons, usually related to the difficulty of use. If you choose to go with another method, I strongly urge you to find a helmet that comes from the manufacturer that way and not mess around with after-market add-on gadgets. Remember, this is your head we're talking about protecting.

That reminds me...my dad, when he was still practicing dentistry, had a sign in his office that read, “Bargain Hunting? Beware of bargains in parachutes, brain surgery, and dentistry.” I think we could add helmets to that list. Wear a good quality helmet that will actually protect your brain, not just meet the minimal legal requirements.

Enjoy the ride, and come home safe!