

BALACLAVAS TESTED BY TEAM RiDE

They all look the same but they vary hugely in price, ambition and performance

Words **Simon Wier** Pictures **Mark Manning**



Winter - it's cold, nasty and, quite frankly, a bit of a rubbish time to be riding bikes. One problem is that while you can add layer upon layer to most areas of your body, your head relies on your helmet for warmth. A good neck tube, sealing the base against drafts, does help keep your head warm but for really cold days, you need more. You need a balaclava.

Now, these are unglamorous products. They're there to do a job that pretty much exposes the seasonal limitations of the motorcycle - something nobody likes to acknowledge. However, as with all bike-related kit, a depth of thought and design goes into the best balaclavas. Clever materials for breathability, warmth and

waterproofing and good proportions are key. Some balaclavas are complex confections, with multiple panels of differing materials, others are very basic - and this is reflected in the range of prices, from £3.99 to more than £20.

With so many to test, the RiDE team took them on ourselves, heading out in the first December cold snap, putting them through their paces, taking the worst snow, ice and council gritters the weather could throw at us. Why did we want to do it ourselves? Because we know from previous experience that after extended use, thick balaclavas will pack the lining of the crash helmet down so when you next try to wear the lid without one, it'll feel loose. We didn't want to have anyone else spoil their helmets.

BECOME A RiDE TESTER

Do you and your mates want to be testers for RiDE? We need groups of riders who ride all year round. You may work together with bikes, you may just meet up every weekend - but if you're out in all weathers, we want to hear from you. Email ride@ride.co.uk and tell

us a little bit about your group. How many of you there are, how many miles you ride each week, what kinds of bikes you ride? We may ask your group to test products like this, we may ask you to join us on a road test. Get involved - become a RiDE tester now.

Oxford Chill-Out

£14.99, www.oxprod.com

I really like this one because it doesn't move when you put your helmet on, the neck is long, windproof and warm, and the face-covering bit is really breathable. Plus it's easy to wiggle my mouth out of it if I want. **MH**



Oxford cotton

£5.99, www.oxprod.com

Tight across my nose and my breath makes the bit around my mouth and chin go all damp. The neck is a bit short too - you'd need to wear a buff to stop drafts. **EF**



Cold Killers Hot Hood

£14.99, www.planet-knox.com

This works a treat. It's easy to put on, the textured lining is pleasant and there's no need for a neck warmer. It extends a long way down your front and forms a perfect seal with jacket, yet there's no restriction of head movement. My favourite. **CO**



Bikers ST Wind Plus

£19.99, www.nevism.co.uk

On the loose side of comfy, but it feels pleasant and is really warm. Wearing this one, my never-mists-up Shark helmet misted up for the first time in three years - curious. **SW**



Bikers ST Aqua

£25.99, www.nevism.co.uk

Very comfortable, helped by the fleece-lined lower Gore-Tex/Ripstop section, which is also very good at keeping the wind out. The top part is friction-free, making it easy to pull your helmet on. **AS**



Held 9050

£18.95, www.held.de

Comfy, with nice material, but not as warm as the Bikers one I tried. It's easy to put on, and there's no friction with your helmet. **AS**



Held 9550

£16.50, www.held.de

Thick Neoprene lower half is warm and waterproof, though has to be carefully tucked down when putting your jacket on. Top section is soft and warm. Vented section by mouth helps keep it dry. On the bulky side but really very good. **SW**



Rev'it Atlas H2O

£23.75, www.revit.eu

It's fiddly to put on and take off (the drawstring gets tangled up with jacket Velcro) and the face hole is an awkward size/shape for specs - but it works well, forming an effective seal and keeping your neck warm. The fleecy section feels good next to your throat. **CO**



Motrax

£4.99, www.motrax.co.uk

Very cheap, but they seem to have achieved that by using the smallest amount of material possible. It is quite soft and fairly warm, but the fit is uncomfortably tight and the protruding seams are irritating. **EF**



Aerostich Travellers Tree Silk balaclava

\$15 (US website), www.aerostich.com

My favourite of the balaclavas I tried. It's the thinnest, so it doesn't restrict neck movement. That thinness also means the aperture is quite floppy, but that's not a problem. **MH**



EDZ All Season Balaclava

£10, www.edz.biz

Thin and simple, so it fits under your helmet easily and doesn't interfere with your specs, but it's not much cop at keeping your neck and head warm. It's not really a winter item; you need a neck cosy as well. **CO**



EDZ Light Thermal

£10, www.edz.biz

Lovely, soft, snug material is very warm, even though mouth-breathing can make it moist. The neck is just long enough and keeps you warm too. It's quite close-fitting but not bulky or restrictive - the most comfortable one I've tested. **SW**



Aerostich merino wool balaclava

\$32 (US website), www.aerostich.com

I thought this one would be as itchy as buggery (if buggery is itchy, I wouldn't know...) but in fact it isn't and I really like it. It's warm and comfortable and just the right size for me. **EF**



Hein Gericke Basic

£3.99, www.hein-gericke.co.uk

Good, unobtrusive balaclava with a well positioned aperture. It's all slightly too short, though, and the seam can irritate your mouth. **MH**



Hein Gericke silk

£10.99, www.hein-gericke.co.uk

Pleasant, thin material though there's an irritating central seam that touches your lips. While your head is a little warmer, this balaclava is not thick enough to keep the neck warm - an extra neck tube is necessary. **SW**



Hein Gericke Racing

It covers all your face apart from two eye holes, which could in theory make it very effective at keeping you cosy, but in practice the material ends up getting a bit sweaty, the eye holes ride up and the seam across the top of the head makes the middle of your scalp itch. **EF**



Hein Gericke All-Season

£8.99, www.hein-gericke.co.uk

Close fitting but not uncomfortably so, and it doesn't move when you pull your lid on. But for me the aperture is irritatingly small. **MH**



Oxford CoolMax

£9.99, www.oxprod.com

CoolMax is a form of polyester designed to wick sweat away. I have no idea if this works - but this balaclava certainly doesn't work very well at keeping your neck warm. It's too short. And there's a horrible prominent seam that rubs against your mouth and/or nose. **CO**

