

## HIGH-VIZ IS THE NEW BLACK

This article is the third in a series discussing rider conspicuity strategies. We have introduced the concept, described more about the why and what of HighViz and described our top 20 HighViz strategies. This article provides more detail about the first three strategies – the use of a HighViz vest, a bright or light colored helmet and a HighViz jacket.

### **The \$20 Reflective Vest**

At the top of our list of effective tools a rider can use to increase his or her visibility is a simple, reflective safety vest. The fluorescent color and retroreflective taping are hard to miss, both day and night. If you're serious about standing out in traffic, a vest will net you the most visibility with the least amount of effort.

A study in New Zealand found that riders who wore any reflective or fluorescent clothing such as a vest were *37 percent less likely* to be involved in a multi-vehicle crash than riders who did not wear a vest.



HighViz upper body clothing makes a huge difference in how easily other drivers can see you. So, what is so special about a cheap safety vest like the ones shown on the next page?



**It's in the terms *fluorescence* and *retroreflectivity*.**

***Fluorescence:*** Light energy causes fluorescent pigments to “glow” in a simple chemical reaction. The energy strikes the atoms in the pigment, exciting them and driving the electrons into a higher orbit. When the electrons return to their normal orbit, the excess energy is emitted in the form of light (similar to Aurora Borealis). This makes the fluorescent garment effectively “glow” during daylight.

***Retroreflectivity:*** Light that strikes a retroreflective material is reflected back to its source, rather than being scattered in all directions. The surface is made up of either tiny glass spheres or triangular prisms that act as a kind of “mirror.” This is the same technology used on road signs to make them light up at night.



True, a goofy fluorescent vest with reflective stripes may detract from your carefully cultivated rider image, but what's more important—your image or your safety?

Look at the picture below. How quickly can you spot the two motorcycle riders in the photo?



Most people first see the rider wearing the yellow vest and need to do a careful visual search before spotting the rider in the gray jacket. You want other roadway uses to see you easily without having to do a careful visual search.

Vests come in any color you want-as long as you want yellow, red, orange, or green. What's more, a basic safety vest will run you less than a tank of gas, last for years through all kinds of weather, and fit over any other riding gear you choose to wear.

For those who want something a little more motorcycle-oriented, several companies make a functional, stylish vest designed for motorcycle riders to military specs, with lots of storage, a custom fit, and cool mesh airflow, such as the ones pictured below.



*Plain and simple: wearing a fluorescent reflective vest is the easiest - and one of the cheapest ways to stand out in traffic.*

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### **The Humble White Helmet**

Another solid tool for making yourself visible to others is a white helmet. The New Zealand study found that riders who wore white helmets were 24 percent less likely to be involved in a multi-vehicle crash than riders who wore black helmets. It makes sense - the helmet is the highest point on the rider and probably the most visible component of a rider's gear. Making that component as HighViz as possible is a very, very good idea.



**What stands out to you in this photo?**

When compared to a dark-colored helmet, a white helmet is much more noticeable, day or night. Even if you choose to wear an all-black ensemble, a white helmet can still help you stand out head-and-shoulders from the crowd. If you'll be replacing your current helmet soon, make it a white one.

### **The Brightly Colored Jacket**

Another HighViz tool you can wear is a brightly colored jacket. Regardless of whether or not they choose to wear a vest or white helmet, most riders prefer to wear some kind of motorcycle jacket.

Unfortunately, many riders (like the rider in the picture below) choose the most "low-viz" color of them all: black



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If you're going to wear a jacket anyway, why not wear one that helps you stand out in traffic? Wearing all black garb and then complaining about the “cagers” who pull out in front of you is the ultimate in hypocritical irresponsibility.

For a rider's protection and visibility, a good jacket in a bright color such as red, orange, green, or yellow is a very smart choice. A fluorescent color is even better, and if it has reflective material, you'll be much, much easier to see in traffic both day and night.



If you already have a dark-colored jacket and don't want to buy another one, consider wearing a \$20 reflective vest over it. If you prefer not to wear a jacket due to other reasons, at least wear a brightly colored shirt and a white helmet. While a shirt won't stand out as much as a jacket due to its lack of bulk, any addition of a bright color will help.

#### ***Editor's Note***

*The preceding material was researched and written by motorcyclist safety expert and author of four books about safe riding Pat Hahn during the time he was employed as the Minnesota Motorcycle Safety Center Public Information and Education Coordinator. Revisions and edits have been made to Mr. Hahn's original articles.*

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