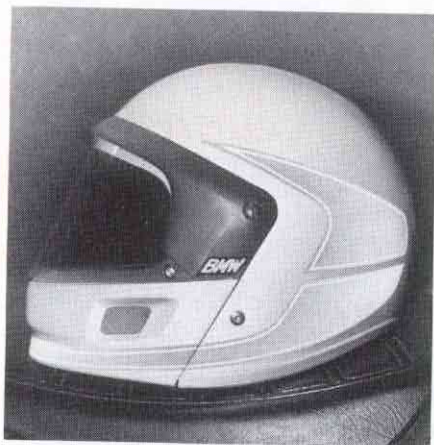


# PRODUCT REPORT

## BMW Helmet System



I am running late. Pull up in front of one of my regular stops, a bakery. Off the bike, inside, full-face helmet still on; raise the entire front section and ask for a half dozen croissants.

The woman behind the counter looks at my Arthurian helmet and says, "My, that's a good idea; why didn't they think of that before."

Why didn't they? Progress: It's in the nature of the beast to take time. I don't know when the first motorcycle helmet was designed and built. Or of what material it was made — leather, perhaps, or cork. I do remember the old pudding-bowl helmets, and I bought my first full (now called open-face) helmet in 1959. Then came the full-face. Progress. Full-face has been around for a while and is constantly being improved upon. The latest gadgetry involves movable chinguards; the best example of this so far, and by far, is the BMW Helmet System.

A helmet's a helmet, but if BMW wants to go high-falutin' and call it a system, so be it. The way the BMW helmet works is quite straight forward. There are pivot points on both sides at about the temples, from which the faceshield pivots; a spring-metal detent device keeps it fixed in one of the three positions between full-open and full-closed. At full-close a spring-loaded bead makes sure the shield will not fly open. A ridge all around the top of the faceshield allows instant one-finger opening — excellent! One criticism I

have is that the material the faceshield is made of is not the most scratch-resistant I have come across; good, but there is better.

The new and trick aspect is that from these same pivot points the entire chinguard will pivot up and sit on top of the helmet. I like that feature. While riding a bike without a windshield a full-face helmet is nice to have on, but when I stop I immediately get a minor sense of claustrophobia which lifting the faceshield will not alleviate. I do that every time I come to a traffic light. Stop for gas, take the helmet off. With the BMW I can lift the chinguard and feel unclaustrophobic.



The helmet can be put on and taken off without raising the chinguard, but 'tis far easier to use the helmet system as it is presented. Along about where your jawbone pivots are two release buttons — push in and the chinguard releases. An added feature is the detachable collar, which cuts down on the wind and cold when the weather turns nasty. The collar is in two pieces, one running around the back of your neck and up to the jaw, the other piece being in the chinguard. One end of our chinguard collar was a bit out of line and should have been replaced, but I never got around to it. The collar is a nifty idea,

and I have not found a helmet which does a better job in closing off the drafts that come in around the neck.

Just as releasing the chinguard requires two hands, so does locking it back into place: one hand at the back of the helmet to steady it, the other to push the chinguard into place. Having a beard, I put a finger beneath the naugahyde collar of the chinguard and pull down, the collar fitting neatly beneath the chin. A note on putting on the helmet: The first several times I treated it like an ordinary helmet, casually tossing it on my head. However, the chinguard on top of the helmet throws the balance off, and the helmet tilted forward, the top of the open section banging me on my nose. I soon learned how to avoid that. This is not a complaint, merely a comment on the fact that this is a new design, and new designs often require learning new habits.

There's another new aspect to the helmet — the fastening device. We're used to the U.S. and Japanese D-rings, or the European sliding-bar fastener, but BMW has a male/female device that releases with the touch of a button. Awfully nice when one's fingers are terribly cold and not functioning properly.

All this is DOT-approved. In the matter of helmet construction DOT standards are stringent enough to satisfy me and my road riding. I don't want to fall down, but I wear a helmet because the possibility is there. However, were I out racing, I would probably wear another helmet, as well as full leathers, boots, gloves, all the paraphernalia we associate with avoiding road rash. But as I putter along the byways between here and wherever, DOT approval is sufficient.

To find out more about this helmet, drop by your local BMW dealer. The sizes tend to be on the small size, and I found myself going  $\frac{1}{8}$  larger than usual. My  $7\frac{3}{8}$  weighs 3 lb. 7 oz. Suggested retail is about \$185, with a replacement clear shield around \$13.50, smoked being \$5 more.

—Clement Salvadori  
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