

THE *RIDE* PRODUCT TEST

# £200 CRASH HELMETS

How good are mid-priced helmets? We test 12 to see where the smart money goes

By Simon Weir Photographs by Mark Manning and Jacques Portal (studio)

A CRASH HELMET is the most important bit of biking kit we all have to buy. It's the only thing we're required to wear by law and it's designed to do one job: to save the wearer's life in an accident.

Except... helmets are really designed to do much more because, after all, we all hope to never need our lid to have to save our lives. So how they're designed to look also matters, the shape of the shell and the graphics (or lack of them) says a lot about how we ride and whether style or budget matters to us.

On top of which, every helmet is designed to be good to use. Linings are meant to be plush, vents cooling, visors

free of mist and aberrations while giving a good field of view. Most are also designed to be quiet, too.

If you're prepared to spend a lot for a top-of-the-line model from a big-name brand, you might get a helmet that delivers on all fronts. It's fair to say nobody expects too much when buying the cheapest helmet they can find.

But what do you get on a moderate budget? A £200 helmet is still a serious investment, but will you get a top-end performance for less money... or will it feel like you're wearing a budget item? We gathered 12 helmets costing between £150 and £210 to find out.

## How we tested them

EACH HELMET WAS tested on the road using a bike with a screen (KTM 1290 Super Adventure) and on track with a naked bike (Yamaha MT-10). Though not counting towards our scores, we have included the SHARP helmet-testing rating for each helmet in the specification, where the rating is available. Our test criteria were:

**Stability:** How badly is the helmet affected by buffeting at speed?

**Noise:** How much wind noise reaches the rider? Quieter helmets get a higher mark.

**Vision:** Is the field of view wide or is it like looking through a letterbox? Is the visor free of distortions at the edges? If there's a Pinlock, does it obstruct the view?

**Vents:** Do they keep the rider's head cool? Do they stop the visor misting? Can they be operated with gloved hands?

**Lining:** Is the lining plush or itchy, cool or sweaty? Is it well fitted? Is it removable?

**Sun visor:** Is it easy to use? Does it cover a good area? Is it dark enough?

**Finish:** How good is the detailing? Are logos or designs neatly lacquered on? Does the chin strap feel high-quality?

**Nolan N87**  
£139.99 plain, £159.99 pattern  
www.motogear.co.uk

**Sizes** 2XS-3XL  
**Shell sizes** 2  
**Material** Thermoplastic  
**Weight** 1630g  
**Removable lining?** Y  
**Pinlock included?** Y  
**Chin strap** Ratchet buckle  
**SHARP rating** Not tested

### Scores

Stability .....	8
Noise .....	6
Vision.....	8
Vents .....	6
Lining.....	8
Sun visor.....	7
Finish.....	8
<b>TOTAL.....</b>	<b>51/70</b>



▲ **Plush, comfy, quiet, stable**  
plush. The N87 is too new to have been SHARP tested yet, but the N86 it replaces was a four-star helmet.



### NOISE & STABILITY

Does wind buffeting make it unpleasant at high speed? Does the roar of the wind deafen you?

### VENTS

Are they just there for decoration or do they keep your head cool? Do they stop the visor getting misty?

### VISOR

Do you get a good view through the aperture? Is the visor free of distortion? Is the mechanism easy to use?

### SUN VISOR

Is it dark enough to keep the sun out of your eyes? Does it cover a good area? Is it easy to raise, lower and adjust?

### BUYING CHECKLIST

## Five things to look out for

### 1 FIT

The best helmet in the world is no good if it doesn't fit you properly. Before buying any lid, always confirm that it's a snug, secure fit - without any tight spots putting pressure on any parts of your head.

### 2 SHELLS

Helmets with a thermoplastic shell will be heavier than fibre-based ones - but fibre lids are expensive to make. Most helmets at this price point will be thermoplastic. If a helmet comes in a range

of shell sizes, the amount of padding needed to get a good fit will be reduced. When there's only one shell size, there will be less padding for the large sizes and loads for the small ones.

### 3 LINERS

The liner does two jobs: keeps you comfortable and, more importantly, keeps the fit secure. You don't want an itchy and scratchy or sweaty liner, or one where the padding will collapse, leaving you with a loose, ill-fitting helmet. A liner that can be removed for cleaning is a good thing.

### 4 VISORS

Check how robust and easy the mechanism is to use (and check how much replacement visors cost). If the visor takes a Pinlock anti-fogging insert, is one included in the box?

### 5 FASTENING

Does the helmet use a double D-ring strap, which you adjust securely each time you put it on? Or does it use a quick-release system - either a seatbelt-type catch or a ratchet-strip type? They need to be regularly adjusted to keep the fit snug.

► High spec, low price and a good range of designs



RIDE MAGAZINE

RECOMMENDED

**HJC FG-ST**

£179.99 plain, £199.99 pattern

www.oxfordproducts.com

**Sizes** XS-XL

**Shell sizes** 2

**Material** Composite fibre

**Weight** 1592g

**Removable lining?** Y

**Pinlock included?** Y

**Chin strap** Double D-ring

**SHARP rating** ★★★★★

► The FG-ST feels like a high-spec lightweight lid, from the smart matt-finish paint to the smooth, non-itchy liner. The field of view is good and deep, so the seam of the Max-Vision Pinlock never gets in the way. The dark two-position sun visor is easy to operate and covers a good area. The vents are easy to operate,

**Scores**

Stability .....	8
Noise .....	6
Vision.....	8
Vents .....	5
Lining.....	8
Sun visor.....	7
Finish.....	8
<b>TOTAL .....</b>	<b>50/70</b>



► **Double D-rings and great liner**

but could be more effective. It's quiet when riding slowly but gets louder, with a slight whistle at high speeds.

**Shark Skwal**

£189.99 plain, £199.99 pattern

www.nevis.uk.com

**Sizes** XS-XL

**Shell sizes** 2

**Material** Thermoplastic

**Weight** 1606g

**Removable lining?** Y

**Pinlock included?** Y

**Chin strap** Ratchet buckle

**SHARP rating** ★★★★★

► The slightly square back of the Skwal doesn't affect its stability, even at speed. It is a squeeze to get on, but it's comfy with a pleasantly non-sweaty liner. The field of view is deep and wide, with no interruptions from the Max-Vision Pinlock. The two-position sun visor, operated on the side of the helmet, covers a good

**Scores**

Stability .....	8
Noise .....	5
Vision.....	8
Vents .....	6
Lining.....	6
Sun visor.....	7
Finish.....	8
<b>TOTAL .....</b>	<b>48/70</b>



► **Square shell is a snug fit**

area and is dark. Charge the Skwal via USB and turn on yellow lights round the vents for visibility at night.



◀ **Yellow lights around the vent are for night visibility. It's charged by USB**

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RECOMMENDED

► **Sun visor could be darker but field of view is good**



**HJC IS-17**

£149.99 plain, £169.99 pattern

www.oxfordproducts.com

**Sizes** XS-XL

**Shell sizes** 2

**Material** Thermoplastic

**Weight** 1642g

**Removable lining?** Y

**Pinlock included?** Y

**Chin strap** Double D-ring

**SHARP rating** ★★★★★

► The IS-17 gives a good, deep field of view and the Pinlock doesn't get in the way. The visor is stiffly sprung and stays ajar at speed, though the vents are easy to operate. The lining is plush and comfortable and it's easy to get glasses on. The weakly sprung two-position sun visor

**Scores**

Stability .....	8
Noise .....	6
Vision.....	8
Vents .....	5
Lining.....	6
Sun visor.....	4
Finish.....	7
<b>TOTAL .....</b>	<b>44/60</b>



► **Peripheral vision is excellent**

operates on the top of the head, is long enough to hit the tester's nose and is a little pale.



► Real premium feel but with a slightly smaller field of view



**AGV K5**  
 £209.99 plain, £229.99 pattern  
[www.moto-direct.com](http://www.moto-direct.com)  
**Sizes** XS-XL  
**Shell sizes** 2  
**Material** Composite fibre  
**Weight** 1492g  
**Removable lining?** Y  
**Pinlock included?** Y  
**Chin strap** Double D-ring  
**SHARP rating** ★★★★★

► A plush, premium-feeling helmet with a lovely non-sweaty interior – but to keep it quiet you need to fit the ear pads (if not putting in Bluetooth speakers). It's easy to get glasses on, but the shallow visor aperture puts the Pinlock seam in your line of sight. The two-position sun visor is a bit pale. Vents are easy to use – apart

**Scores**

Stability	8
Noise	6
Vision	5
Vents	4
Lining	8
Sun visor	5
Finish	8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>44/60</b>



▲ **Double D-rings and top-end feel** from the chin one, operated inside the helmet – but it can still get misty unless the visor is propped ajar.

► High-quality paint and an air pump to adjust the fit of the lining



**Scorpion Exo 510 Air**  
 £139.99 plain, £169.99 pattern  
[www.tranam.co.uk](http://www.tranam.co.uk)  
**Sizes** XS-XL  
**Shell sizes** 3  
**Material** Thermoplastic  
**Weight** 1672g  
**Removable lining?** Y  
**Pinlock included?** Y  
**Chin strap** Ratchet buckle  
**SHARP rating** ★★★★★

► There's a good field of view without any interruption from the Max-Vision Pinlock. The two-position sun visor is easy to use when you're used to finding its small lever on the side of the helmet, but could cover a greater area and be darker. The vents are easy to open. There's no breeze but the interior doesn't mist or get too

**Scores**

Stability	7
Noise	6
Vision	7
Vents	5
Lining	5
Sun visor	5
Finish	6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>41/70</b>



▲ **Easy-remove liner for accidents** hot so they must do something. Lining pumps up to tailor fit but getting glasses on is a battle.

**Scorpion Exo 1200 Air**  
 £199.99 plain, £239.99 pattern  
[www.tranam.co.uk](http://www.tranam.co.uk)

**Sizes** XS-XL  
**Shell sizes** 3  
**Material** Composite fibre  
**Weight** 1588g  
**Removable lining?** Y  
**Pinlock included?** Y  
**Chin strap** Double D-ring  
**SHARP rating** ★★★★★

► A glossy finish might reflect the quality better than this matt exterior with raised white decals. It has a fibre shell and double D-ring fastener plus an air pump to adjust the fit of the plush interior. It's hard to get glasses on, but the field of view is good with an unobtrusive Max-Vision Pinlock. The sun visor could be

**Scores**

Stability	7
Noise	5
Vision	7
Vents	5
Lining	7
Sun visor	5
Finish	6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>42/70</b>



▲ **Fibre lid with double D-rings** darker. It's not too noisy at 80 but it's deafening at three-figure speeds, as the spoiler roars like an angry bear.

◀ It's a classy lid but it would be better if it wasn't so loud at speed



**Shark S700S**  
 £149.99 plain, £159.99 pattern  
[www.nevis.uk.com](http://www.nevis.uk.com)

**Sizes** XS-XL  
**Shell sizes** 1  
**Material** Thermoplastic  
**Weight** 1584g  
**Removable lining?** Y  
**Pinlock included?** Y  
**Chin strap** Ratchet buckle  
**SHARP rating** ★★★★★

► There's no chin curtain, contributing to this being one of the loudest and windiest helmets here – so even though the easy-to-use vents don't appear to do much, it doesn't get too misty. There's a wide field of view, though the Pinlock seam is visible. The two-position sun visor on the side of the helmet is

**Scores**

Stability	7
Noise	4
Vision	7
Vents	5
Lining	5
Sun visor	6
Finish	6
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>40/70</b>



▲ **No chin curtain: adds to noise** easy to use but could be darker. The liner feels synthetic and is pretty thin compared with some others here.

◀ One of the loudest helmets here – and we don't mean the paint scheme...



► Indulge your inner Rossi with a well-finished, well-priced replica



**AGV K3 SV**  
 £159.99 plain, £189.99 pattern  
[www.moto-direct.com](http://www.moto-direct.com)  
**Sizes** XS-XL  
**Shell sizes** 2  
**Material** Thermoplastic  
**Weight** 1566g  
**Removable lining?** Y  
**Pinlock included?** Y  
**Chin strap** Ratchet catch  
**SHARP rating** ★★★★★

► It's pretty noisy above 60mph and the vents don't seem to do a great deal (and the chin one is hard to operate when riding). The visor can be propped ajar, which keeps it mist-free inside. The fairly shallow visor aperture restricts view and the Pinlock seam is right where you need

**Scores**

Stability	8
Noise	5
Vision	5
Vents	4
Lining	7
Sun visor	5
Finish	7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>41/60</b>



▲ **Chin vent operates inside the lid** to look. The sun visor isn't very dark but is easy to use. The lining is plush and doesn't get sweaty or itchy.

► Slide locks the visor shut. Pinlock is not included



**Held Masuda**  
 £159.99 plain, £169.99 pattern  
[www.held-uk.co.uk](http://www.held-uk.co.uk)  
**Sizes** XS-2XL  
**Shell sizes** 2  
**Material** Composite fibre  
**Weight** 1526g  
**Removable lining?** Y  
**Pinlock included?** N  
**Chin strap** Ratchet buckle  
**SHARP rating** Not tested

► The only helmet here that doesn't come with a Pinlock – and it needs one, as the vents aren't great so the interior mists. The visor locks closed, giving a fair field of view (though with less peripheral vision than some). Easy-to-use rocker on the helmet base drops a dark two-position sun

**Scores**

Stability	7
Noise	5
Vision	6
Vents	5
Lining	5
Sun visor	6
Finish	5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>39/60</b>



▲ **Sun visor rocker is on the base** visor. An air-pump tailors the fit, but the lining is a bit sweaty and only the cheek pads come out for cleaning.

► Good field of view with well-shaped, unobtrusive Pinlock



**Caberg Drift**

£199.99 plain, £209.99 pattern

[www.feridax.com](http://www.feridax.com)

**Sizes** XS-XL

**Shell sizes** 1

**Material** Composite fibre

**Weight** 1466g

**Removable lining** Y

**Pinlock included?** Y

**Chin strap** Double D-ring

**SHARP rating** N/A

► The nicest thing about this helmet is the glossy paint job. The interior doesn't feel plush and it gets sweaty fast. The field of vision is good, the Max-Vision Pinlock not getting in the way at all. The sun visor is a good shape and reasonably dark, but a bit fiddly in use. There's a lever to hold the visor ajar - useful as the

**Scores**

Stability .....	7
Noise .....	6
Vision.....	7
Vents .....	5
Lining.....	4
Sun visor.....	4
Finish.....	5
<b>TOTAL .....</b>	<b>38/70</b>



▲ It's an odd shape - and feels it

easy-to-operate vents are fairly ineffective. It's quiet at low speed but gets noisy fast once you're past 60.

**Kabuto Kamui**

£159.99 plain, £179.99 pattern

[www.tri-motive.co.uk](http://www.tri-motive.co.uk)

**Sizes** XS-XL

**Shell sizes** 2

**Material** Thermoplastic

**Weight** 1726g

**Removable lining?** Y

**Pinlock included?** Y

**Chin strap** Ratchet buckle

**SHARP rating** N/A

► Lovely matt finish and slick graphics on the outside, but you have to fit the breath guard and the fiddly chin curtain yourself. The field of vision is on the shallow side and the seam of the Pinlock is visible. The two-position, slide-operated sun visor is fairly pale. The synthetic lining gets itchy pretty quickly and

**Scores**

Stability .....	7
Noise .....	4
Vision.....	6
Vents .....	4
Lining.....	5
Sun visor.....	5
Finish.....	6
<b>TOTAL .....</b>	<b>37/70</b>



▲ It's a fight to fit that chin curtain

the fiddly vents do little to cool you. It's one of the noisiest helmets here at low speeds as well as high ones.

◀ Big on style, not so big on refinement



**HJC FG-ST**  
SW18 £200

**Nolan N87**  
£140-£160

**Shark Skwal**  
SW18 £200



**THE RIDE VERDICT**

**ALL OF THESE** helmets are good - but some definitely give more for your hard-earned £200. The best of them really do feel like top-end lids, especially the fibre-shelled AGV K5, HJC FG-ST and Scorpion Exo 1200 Air.

All the helmets were stable, both on the road and on the track, though some were much noisier than others. Liners and sun visors could have been cast by Sergio Leone, with the good, the bad and the ugly all present.

In a strong field, three helmets stood out in this test. The Shark Skwal has illuminated highlights, but behind the gadget is a comfortable, stable, quiet lid with a superb field of view. The HJC FG-ST is a superbly classy, comfortable helmet that's finished to a very high standard. They both earn Recommended triangles.

The Best Buy triangle, though, goes to the Nolan N87. As well as being the all-round strongest performer in the test, it's also more affordable than its closest rivals. It's a lot of helmet for a very reasonable amount of money. **R**