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LAKE GEORGE BIKER, CONCERNED WITH SAFETY, DEVELOPS NEW HELMET; READY FOR DISTRIBUTION



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Lake George entrepreneur Jason Kirshon decided to develop a better motorcycle helmet after he attended Laconia Motorcycle Week in New Hampshire in 2008.

“What struck me was that out of 200,000 attending bikers, I only saw one wearing a helmet,” said Kirshon. “And that guy was riding a moped.”

New Hampshire is one of just three states with no motorcycle helmet laws. Nineteen states, including New York, have universal helmet laws. In the remaining states, helmet laws apply only to riders under the age of 18 or 21. The age varies by state.

Kirshon, an avid motorcyclist, understands why helmets are so unpopular. It comes down to comfort.

“There are two types of half-shell helmets,”

he said. “The first is DOT (Department of Transportation) approved. They are extremely big and bulky and have 2.5 to 3 inch-thick of Styrofoam on the inside. They make you look like a mushroom head. They are very uncomfortable and they catch a lot of wind. Wind drag is very uncomfortable on a long ride.”

Kirshon described the second type of helmet as a novelty helmet. These helmets do not meet DOT safety standards and offer little to no protection. They are illegal to wear in New York and in other states that have helmet laws.

Because it is highly unlikely for the police to stop a rider to do a helmet check, many bikers wear novelty helmets in order to avoid getting tickets. Hundreds of thousands of novelty helmets are sold each year.

“A good majority of bikers wear novelty helmets, which is actually kind of scary,” said Kirshon.

He also noted that DOT-approved helmets do not provide adequate protection in many crash scenarios. That is because they are designed to provide protection in cases where crashes are caused by linear acceleration—straight-on impacts.

“The helmet industry has been regulated by DOT since 1974,” said Kirshon. “The testing parameters were established at that time. They have never developed a more sophisticated line of testing. To this day, helmets are tested purely on linear acceleration. But, in reality, over 80 percent of head injuries are greatly affected by angular acceleration. These are rotational injuries to the brain. The helmet industry does not have that in their testing.”

After leaving Laconia in 2008, Kirshon said he couldn’t stop thinking about developing a better motorcycle helmet. At the time, he was working in construction.

“When I left Laconia, that was on my mind,” he said. “When you have a passion—when you have an obsession—it’s something that never leaves your mind. It is always there.”

In his spare time, he began working on his helmet design. Although not an engineer by trade, he said he has always had an aptitude for math and science.

“When my passion ignited, I became very academic,” he said. “There were years of research that went into developing this technology.”

Unlike conventional motorcycle helmets, the helmet Kirshon invented has a soft interior that measures just 0.5 inches in thickness. In addition to being comfortable, the helmet conforms to heads of all shapes and sizes. It also stays in place without slipping and has no wind drag.

“Our interior—instead of being a rigid structure—it’s a fluid structure. It’s very soft. We have a silicone bladder with a proprietary fluid inside,” he said. “Our shell is very rigid, very strong, but practically impenetrable in comparison

to other motorcycle helmet shells. The combination of materials is completely different. The way that it handles energy is completely different. When you are wearing this helmet, it really doesn't feel like you are wearing anything additional. It has comfort you won't experience in any other helmet"

Kirshon obtained a utility patent for his helmet design after several years of working on it. By that point in time, he had invested a considerable amount of time and money in the project.

"As far as testing the product, every so often I would gather up enough money and fly to an impact lab in California and do testing on my helmet," he said.

"We are performing tremendously on the linear acceleration testing. But, above and beyond that, what our helmet does is directly address the angular acceleration problem that the rest of the industry is not looking at."

Three years ago, Kirshon spoke publicly for the first time about his helmet at an event at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. The event brought together entrepreneurs,

inventors, and investors. That is where he met Donald DeVito. At the time, DeVito was working in investment banking and corporate financing. He said he was very impressed by Kirshon's presentation.

"Because there were a lot of engineers there, there were a lot of great questions being asked of him. He really got to talk about the technology," said DeVito. "I was interested in this technology and most importantly in a person like Jay who understood he had a revolutionary innovation but needed a business partner."

DeVito and Kirshon founded Kirsh Helmets in January 2017. Since that time, they have raised \$1.5 million in capital and opened an office in the BizLab, a business incubator in Schenectady. They also registered as a START-UP NY company. START-UP NY offers new and expanding businesses the opportunity to operate tax-free for 10 years.

The helmet is currently in pre-sale and will be widely available in the near future. It will be sold online and in stores. Kirsh Helmets will also have representatives at motorcycle events throughout the country.

It is there that riders will have a chance to take a test ride in the helmet.

"The proof is in the ride," said Kirshon.

The helmets retail for \$245. In comparison, a standard helmet costs \$200 or less.

"Our helmet costs more for us to make than the average helmet retails for," said Kirshon. "But the helmet industry uses cheap materials and cuts corners. You get an inferior product. We are the exact opposite of what everyone else is doing. The materials we use are top of the line—the best we can get our hands on in every part of the helmet from the rivet to the trim strap to the chin strap to the shell material. We use the highest quality silicon you can get. We are not cutting corners."

Kirsh Helmets currently has eight employees. Helmet components—all American made—are being produced in several different regional locations. The company's Queensbury manufacturing facility is scheduled to open by the end of the month.