

HOOD JEANS

Don't ask me why we do it, but over time we become complacent. Our best intentions go out of the window, and we take our bikes out without stopping to put on leather trousers. There are some numpties who are happy on 180mph bikes in shorts, t-shirt and flip-flops, but that's their problem ... well, theirs and their skin graft specialist's.

Of course, I know why we do it – or at least why I do it: I don't bend as easily as I did in my twenties and thirties, and the leather jeans that used to be so comfortable in my youth have become restrictive, as much because of my ageing frame as middle-aged spread. I could get some of those padded and elastic trousers but I'm not ready to look like a cross between Michelin Man and a Power Ranger just yet, and so I wear jeans: good hardwearing denim. Made for factory workers in late 18th Century America, they're tough and resilient ... and will last for seconds if introduced to the tarmac at speed before they are worn through. Beneath the denim: skin.

I did play with armoured jeans for a time, and still have a pair of well-used Shoshonis which are waiting a repair to the crotch, but I've always found that after a few hours, I can't wait to get the buggers off. They're lighter than leather, but double thickness in some places, triple in others which makes them almost as hot as leather, and the armour – their only protection – sits heavily on my knees, which feel liberated when released from the burden. Take the armour out, and it's like wearing two pairs of jeans, at best. If you reckon normal jeans will last two seconds, two pairs will last four. I'll let you speculate as to the stopping distance of a dismounted rider on tarmac from 30mph, but it's not enough, unless you're lucky.

After Shoshoni came Gialli with Kevlar panels sewn into denim, and giving a heavily stitched pattern on the outer garment, but there are really just two players that we're likely to be interested in. We typically dress very conservatively, and a pair of normal looking jeans scores highly, barely raising an eyebrow. That means Australia's Draggin' Jeans and Britain's very own Hood Motorcycle Jeans. I've been switching between Hood's two primary denim products for a fortnight, and I'm converted.

The two I've been playing with are their original K7s and the Concept Six jeans, which were introduced to compete with their main rival and meet their performance claims, which are very different to each other in many ways but identical in one: they can both be worn as everyday clothing, which is exactly what I have been doing for the duration. A day in the life of a camera-wielding scribbler includes crawling round on your hands and knees on every kind of surface in every kind of condition you can imagine trying to get the right angle to take a blurred shot, and hours sitting at a kitchen table hammering away at a keyboard, as well as the everyday walking, driving (don't dismiss that: a real pain in leather jeans) and, of course, riding in them – all in the half-way decent weather at the back end of May this year, once the rain had stopped – and there has only been a few occasions when I would have traded them for my lightweight combats. That was only with the Concept Six versions, which is entirely because of the thermal properties of the type of Kevlar used. Well, I say Kevlar: they say Aramid because that's what Kevlar is, just that Kevlar is a tradename and Aramid isn't.

The differences between the models can almost be summed up in the way that the Aramid material is made into a fabric, and the amount of the protective material used.

The K7s are almost a complete pair of trousers made from woven Aramid sewn into the outer denim layer, whereas the Concept Six models have knitted Aramid fibre panels sewn into selected areas that are the likely contact patches if you should take a tumble, which also means there are visible seams on the outside, but nothing too conspicuous.

The Concept Six should be cooler, because there are more areas where there is but a single layer of denim between you and the outside world, but in my experience, the texture of the woven material is akin to a thermal insulator and makes the skin adjacent to it feel warmer. The woven Aramid of the K7 is smoother, cooler against the skin, and actually felt cooler to me as a garment, and are consequently the jeans that I've ended up wearing



more frequently. Which is best? Tough call. It's said that the knitted material is more abrasion resistant, because the way that the material is formed means it turns the abrasion task into a tensile one – and a

major benefit of Kevlar/Aramid is its tensile strength. The weave, on the other hand, is said to be compromised because its more regular pattern prevents it from making the most of that tensile strength. Both types are infinitely better than nothing, and I'd suggest that if you can slide far enough to cause the weave to break down, you would have been travelling fast enough to warrant wearing Kevlar-lined, armoured leathers: don't expect miracles, they're not a get out of jail free card. If you want that degree of extra protection at the hips and knees, both pairs come with Velcro for attaching CE approved Knox armour – which you slide between the denim and Aramid layers on the knees, and at the hips too on the K7, but are stuck to a free

hanging, and slightly irritating strip at the hip on the Concept Six, which doesn't have the full Aramid layer to slide it behind.

If you're looking to pick holes – no pun intended – in the Concept Sixes, you could reflect on the possibility that the jeans material might spin round, taking the protective layer with it, which could expose areas that were intended to be protected, which is true of any Kevlar garment with protective panels and so favours the fully-lined K7, but we're splitting hairs here.

What is not open to debate is the quality of both. My gut feeling is that the weave is better, but science doesn't always work on gut feelings. I'd be more inclined to live in a pair of K7s than Concept Sixes, because I find them more comfortable, but it's a marginal preference and you might well take the contrary view. There is, however, one undisputable truth which is that they will offer much more protection if you're wearing them, than if you've tucked them away in your wardrobe because you're not comfortable in them.

The other reassuring part is the quality of the denim top layer in both cases. Well-tailored 14.5oz denim in blue or black for the K7, dark stone-washed 'ring thread' denim for the Concept Six, with decent sized belt loops and a change pocket you can get your fingers in, they have nice touches like pockets made entirely from the same denim as the outer layer rather than the soft white cotton favoured by almost everyone else, which should mean that they'll take the abuse of carrying things like keys far better. Every edge is over-locked or hemmed, and either pair could be worn out in smart/casual environments without anyone being any the wiser – and if you mix in dodgy circles, or drink in less salubrious establishments, the K7 has a matching jacket which too is fully lined and offers protection from a different sort of distress.

Pre-shrunk, and machine washable – they passed my washing test without shrinking further and I'm not especially domesticated – they come in sizes from 30-44-inch waists for men, 8-18 ladies: specific ladies cuts are available for all denim styles.

And that's scratching the surface of their range: the ND4 gives the same colour and type of denim as the Concept Six but with the Aramid weave, there's a black polycotton H2 for the office, and camo or green combat pants for the field.

Prices are £68.50 for the K7 and £69.50 for all other woven Aramid trousers, climbing to £78.50 for the Concept Six, and optional Knox armour is available at £7.50 per pair (knees or hips) – all prices exclude P&P which is £5.80 per order. They're available on-line at www.hoodjeans.co.uk or on 01953 861166 and at MTC Motorcycles in Reading (0118 959 5397), who were so impressed with them that they persuaded Hood to take them on as a stockist.

ANDY