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Helmet Information

The information below is based on much internet research, talking to vendors in stores, talking with club members who have purchased helmets, and purchasing two helmets.

Pricing is pretty much the same wherever you go (store or internet). However, on the internet you should easily be able to get free shipping and a free helmet bag. If not, you may want to choose another vendor.

The only place around here to try on an Automobile helmet is Speed Unlimited in Morningside, near Andrews Air Force base. They have Snell SA2005 rated helmets made by G-Force in the store. Otherwise, to try on a helmet you have to visit a motorcycle store. Online sites have measuring guides for selecting the correct size. They seem to work pretty well.

"DOT" rated helmets are acceptable for some (not all) drag race tracks. Otherwise, this rating is useless to you. The SCCA and NCCC both require Snell Foundation ("Snell") rated helmets. The latest series is 2005. Previous series are 2000 and 1995. Buy a Snell 2005 or newer.

<< ADDENDUM as of 12 Oct 09: The Snell 2010 specification helmets are expected to be available in the Fall of 2010. At that time Snell 2000 helmets will be declared obsolete, and will not be accepted at SCCA, NCCC, NASA, and other sanctioned events. >>

The "SA" rating (as in Snell SA2005) stands for "Special Applications" and is designed for all automobile low speed and high speed events, including drag race, Autocross, High Speed Driving Events (HPDE), high speed track or Autocross, "track days", high speed license classes, etc. "SA" helmets are designed to absorb more than one impact and are fire/flame proof.

The "M" rating (as in Snell M2005) is designed primarily for motorcycle applications. However, these helmets are accepted for drag racing and low speed automobile events, such as a standard Autocross. "M" helmets look and feel exactly like "SA" helmets. To the eye there is no difference. "M" helmets are designed to withstand only one impact and they are not flame resistant.

<< ADDENDUM as of 14 Sep 08: Some drag strips are starting to require SA rated helmets for cars, and are less accepting of M rated helmets. The DOT rating on helmets at drag strips is becoming less acceptable (or not acceptable at all). We heard today that Capitol Raceway is starting to require SA helmets. >>

SA helmets can easily be \$100 more expensive than their M counterparts. Some people choose SA helmets because they are planning to get a high speed license and participate in "track day" / HPDE type events, or they want the added protection afforded by the SA rating. It's a personal preference. Regular Autocross participants recommend SA helmets. However, most vendors will say that M helmets are perfectly fine. Either way, if there's any chance you might do some drag racing or high speed driving, then you should definitely get an SA rated helmet.

"Bell" seems to be the industry standard in higher-end helmets. One notch down are Pyrotec

(which is a division of Bell) and G-Force. These two appear to be the most popular automobile helmets. Prices range from about \$100 (M2005, open face model) to \$250 (SA2005, closed face model), and higher.

There is no difference in safety rating between open face and closed face models. It's a personal preference. Note that some people do not like the fit of an open face helmet. Depending on the manufacturer, they can actually fit somewhat tight around the cheek and jaws. Often times the same size of closed face helmet will not feel as tight, even though it wraps around the chin. Also, some people prefer close face helmets for the extra protection to the face in case of air bag deployment. Others prefer the less restrictive open face style. Face shields can be removed from the closed face models to make them less restrictive, and to make it easier to put on glasses or sun glasses. (Face shields are not usually necessary since we are driving close cockpit cars with a big windshield).

Pyroprotect and G-Force helmets seem to be priced exactly the same. Pyroprotect is a division of Bell. Both brands come in white, black, and different graphics designs (extra cost). Some folks have purchased white helmets and then applied their own graphics or decals from harrisdecals.com (not necessary.... but fun)! White or black, plain or graphics – it's all just personal choice. There are other fine helmet manufacturers as well. Just make sure you get a Snell 2005 rated design, or a Snell 2010 when they become available.

There are several internet vendors to choose from. Some club members have used Apex Performance, formerly near Pittsburg, now in South Carolina. Exchanges are free, but you must pay for shipping both ways (seems to be the industry standard). And, most internet vendors charge a 15% re-stocking fee for returns. "Linda" at Apex was very knowledgeable and very helpful. Those folks are drivers and racers. Note: vendor inventories fluctuate, so don't wait until the last minute to order a helmet - they may have to drop-ship an item to you from the manufacturer. Leave yourself time to make a return if necessary.

Several club members have helmets, and would probably be happy to let other members try them on for size.

NOTE: if you are new to the Autocross world and don't have a helmet, but want to try out the sport, some events will make "loaner" helmets available at the events. (Best to call ahead first and confirm). HPDE and Track Day events do not generally have loaner helmets.

Some vendors/info sites:

apexperformance.net

pyroprotect.com (no free bag)

summitracing.com

discoveryparts.com

extremesupply.com

helmetcity.com

soloperformance.com

gforce.com

harrisdecals.com (you can get lost in this site)!