

Body protection made easy



Whether you're planning to go eventing, about to back a young horse or just go out hacking, consideration should always be given to body protection.

Designed to absorb impact from a fall or kick from a horse, body protectors are compulsory for some competitions. But an increasing number of riders report feeling more confident - and therefore riding more positively - when wearing one in everyday situations from hacking to schooling over fences.

Another reason many more riders are opting for body protection is that modern garments are more flexible and lightweight than their predecessors. Not only that, 21st century body protectors come in fun, fashionable colours (or plain if you prefer), are quick and easy to put on - and don't necessarily cost as much as you may think.

A good fit is the key to comfort and safety. BETA trains retailers to fit body protectors so that they can offer riders free, personalised fittings.

What's the best body protector for you?

BETA originally brought together riding organisations, doctors, riders, manufacturers and retailers to develop the now widely recognised BETA Body Protector Standard.

The BETA 2009 Body Protector Standard meets all the requirements of the European standard (EN 13158:2009). A revised edition of the BETA 2000 standard was published and adopted by BETA in April 2009 as the new BETA 2009 standard. The BETA 2009 version continues as the current standard. No body protectors have been made to the BETA 2000 standard since July 2011 so garments with 2000 standard labels will therefore be a minimum of 3 years old now, if they were made at the latest date of July 2011. Under the BETA Standard, garments are additionally re-tested annually for consistency of quality of materials used and manufacture. We would recommend that if you are looking to purchase a new body protector now that you look for garments with the 2009 label on them.

The BETA Standard sets criteria for shock-absorption, controls the area of the body that must be covered and ensures there are minimal gaps between the protective foam panels. It encompasses three levels, each designed for different activities and denoted by a colour-coded label on the garment.

- Level 1 (black label) provides the lowest level of protection that is only considered appropriate for licensed jockeys while racing.
- Level 2 (brown label) offers a lower than normal level of protection so is considered suitable for low risk situations - not including jumping, riding on the roads, riding young or excitable horses or riding while inexperienced.
- Level 3 (purple label) is considered appropriate for general riding, competitions including eventing and working with horses. Level 3 body protectors should prevent minor bruising that would have produced stiffness and pain, reduce soft tissue injuries and prevent a limited number of rib fractures.

There is a separate BETA Standard for shoulder protectors. Research into falls onto the shoulder during eventing competitions revealed that wearing shoulder protection reduces the risk of breaking your collarbone by up to 80%.

Make the most of your body protector

Body protectors should be replaced at least every three to five years, after which the impact absorption properties of the foam may have started to decline.

Garments bearing the now obsolete Level 5 or 7, Class 1, 2 or 3 labels will no longer be effective and should be replaced. You should now also think about replacing garments with the 2000 label with a garment bearing the current BETA 2009 Standard.

If you should have a heavy fall, your body protector should be checked immediately for dents. The foam will expand back to its original shape within 30 minutes; but if a dent is showing on examination, then it's likely that this part of the garment has lost its impact absorption properties and should be replaced.

Hidden damage that a body protector may have sustained is also a good reason for avoiding second-hand garments or those with unknown histories. Taking good care of your body protector means that it will last longer within the three to five year recommended lifespan. So don't leave it lying around at the yard or in the lorry to be chewed and trodden on. Spending too much time in a hot car or damp tackroom won't do it any good either.

When not in use, body protectors should be hung on a clothes hanger. Doing up zips ensures they keep their shape, while closing Velcro fastenings will help prevent them becoming clogged with horse hair and hay particles.

Most body protectors are made from heat sensitive PVC nitrile foam, which is why they feel increasingly comfortable as they soften and mould to the wearer's body. So try storing your protector in a warm (but not artificially hot) environment to ensure it's nice and flexible for that early morning ride.

Free fittings

Visit a BETA-trained retailer – indicated by a BETA Safety Certificate displayed in-store - to get a free, personalised fitting of your new body protector.

BETA runs regular courses to train retailers in the construction, correct use, fitting and maintenance of body protectors – specialist information they can pass on to you when you visit their tack shops or show stands.

BETA training, some of which is also open to professionals such as instructors, regularly takes place across the UK and Ireland.

So look for the BETA Safety Certificate, and ask for the member of staff named on it to guide you in the selection your new body protector. They will be only too pleased to help, and this unique service won't cost you a penny more than the price of the garment.

To find your nearest BETA-trained retailer, telephone +44 (0) 1937 587062, email tinah@beta-int.com or search the BETA members database for trained members.

- [Download BETA Body protector leaflet](#)
- [Download Current list of Body protector licensees and garments approved to the BETA Standard](#)
- [Download Revision to the BETA Standard](#)
- [Download BETA 2009 Standard document](#)
- [Download NEW A3 Body Protector Poster](#)