

## Best Vest

### How do I find the best safety vest to wear while jumping?

By Holly Werner

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**Q:** I am looking for a good safety vest to wear while jumping. How do I find the best one?

**A:** There are two factors to consider when purchasing a safety vest made especially for riding: certification and comfort/fit.

Some of the older brands and models are not American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) certified. In the U.S., you must have on a safety vest for the cross-country phase at recognized eventing shows, although vests are not yet required to be certified. New ASTM-certified vests cost around \$100 and upward.

The European Union also has a certification system that some riders feel is more stringent than the ASTM's. British Equestrian Trade Association (BETA) 2000 testing levels (1, 2 and 3) were implemented in the year 2000. Level 3 is recommended for those riding on hard surfaces, jumping, and riding green or rambunctious horses.

Some brands of vests are now both ASTM- and Beta 2000 Level 3-certified. These cost approximately \$200 and up.

The Woof Wear EXO Body Protector is the only vest currently available with an internal metal cage that is designed to protect riders from being crushed by the horse after a rotational fall. These are BETA 2000 level 3 certified, but at least triple the price of foam BETA-certified vests.

Another recent advance that also costs considerably more than foam vests is the Point Two 'Pro Air' jacket. Originally available in Europe, it is now also sold by an American manufacturer, and is the only vest that inflates like an airbag when you fall off the horse. It is designed to be worn over a certified foam safety vest. The Pro Air clips to your saddle via a small cable, which detaches in a fall, causing the vest to inflate with carbon dioxide in 0.1 seconds. It can be re-used after replacing the air canisters.

On to the second point: comfort. Many advances have been made since the days when the only safety vest came in green and made you look like a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle, complete with huge shoulder epaulets. Even with such advances as thinner and lighter materials, brand preference mostly depends on comfort. It's best to go to a brick-and-mortar store, at least to try them on, as opposed to purchasing online sight unseen. Try adding a helmet and sitting in a test saddle in jump position. Is your movement free or obstructed? Does the vest feel uncomfortable anywhere? Does the back of the helmet hit the top of the vest? Keep in mind that some vests are heat-sensitive and designed to mold to your form after you've had them on for a while.

That should give you a few pointers before you go shopping. Good luck!

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