

# Arai Defiant Pro-Cruise helmet

**“High End” means more than just “High Cost”**

By Wes Fleming #87301

**MOTORCYCLE HELMETS HAVE** one job: to protect your skull and brain. They do this in two different ways. First, the hard outer shell protects your head from impact, incursion (think punctures) and abrasion. Second, the extruded polystyrene liner (EPS – the brand name is Styrofoam) is there to absorb energy in an impact, to effectively slow down your brain as it sloshes forward and backward in your skull as you come to a screeching, unplanned halt at the incident scene.

Beyond those two things, everything else about a helmet is designed to make it as comfortable as possible to wear. Washable, moisture-wicking liners, vents, noise reduction, and the like are all about comfort.

If you're familiar with Arai's helmets, you already know the Japanese company has a stellar reputation for hand-forming every helmet. Their motto – “made for riders by riders” – isn't just a tag line from the marketing department; Arai listens to feedback from riders and the Defiant is an example of that – they slightly altered their standard Intermediate Oval head shape to better fit a wider variety of riders that showed interest in this helmet.

It's a good thing, too, because a Defiant Pro-Cruise is going to set you back more than \$700. MSRP is \$789.95, but the Defiant Pro-Cruise can be found at most dealers and online for about \$710. Price-wise, that compares to full-face helmets from AGV, Schubert and Shoei, as well as Bell's high-end carbon-fiber offerings. It's rarified air in the helmet world when prices get above \$700, and riders have to ask themselves if such a

helmet is really worth it when they can go buy an AFX for \$75 or an HJC for \$100.

I'm not an unbiased source for info in that regard, as I have owned several Arai helmets, but I'm not going to proselytize to you and repeat the oft-mangled cliché, “If you've got a \$100 head, buy a \$100 helmet.” I'll tell you this, though, I put my daughter in an HJC because she doesn't ride much and she grows out of the things twice a year.

It's no doubt scientifically debatable as to whether a low-end AFX is physically safer or more protective than a high-end Arai. Shells are shells and EPS is EPS, after all, and as long as those things do their job, one helmet is pretty much as safe as any other

helmet, provided they've passed the same safety standards such as DOT, Snell and ECE.

The more costly a helmet, the more likely it is to be made from space-age materials like composites and carbon fiber. A costly helmet is more likely to have multi-density EPS, strategically located to best protect your gray matter. Expensive helmets are more likely to have effective ventilation and better wind noise reduction. If you spend 12 to 15 hours a day on a motorcycle in extremely hot or cold weather, that cheap helmet that protects your head just fine in a crash is likely to be so uncomfortable that you'd rather be wearing a full-face





cactus instead.

I'll start there, then: The Defiant Pro-Cruise is just about the most comfortable helmet I've ever worn, and that includes doing a 14-hour day in 90-degree heat with 85 percent humidity. The Comfort Head Liner (fully removable, replaceable and washable) wicks sweat away from the head effectively, and the ventilation helps keep you cool by evaporating that sweat. While I left them in place, the Defiant Pro-Cruise has four sets of 5 mm peel-away layers – two each at the temples and one in each cheek pad. These are the real differences between a low-end helmet and a high-end one: comfort, customization and configurability.

From a fit and finish standpoint, the Defiant is everything you expect from Arai. There isn't anything that looks out of place, every vent slider works crisply and predictably, every seam is sealed, and the paint is fantastic. This is the first matte-finished helmet I've ever owned, as well as the first mostly black helmet, but I like the interplay between the black sides and the gunmetal gray center. The pop of the orange stripes is nice, too, though in a perfect world they'd be much wider. The finish has so far proved to be resistant to everyday nicks and scratches and still looks good after several thousand miles of use and many days commuting to work.

There's not a lot I think Arai could improve on this helmet, but there is one thing. The strap with the D-rings on it could stand to be an inch longer; getting the strap cinched is a bit fiddly at first and takes some getting used to, especially if (like me) you have big hands. That brings me to another fiddly aspect of the Defiant. Because of how the SAI face shield is designed, it doesn't open as wide as other brands, which makes it difficult to get my eyeglasses on. What I do is put the helmet partway on, put my glasses on, and then pull the helmet down into position before doing up the chin strap.

I won't get too into the Pro Shade face shield that comes standard with the Defiant Pro-Cruise; for more info on that, see Ron Davis' review of the updated Pro Shade in

the September 2015 *Owners News*. Because of the design of the Pro Shade, Arai had to redesign the brow vents on the face shield. The normal SAI shield has brow vents that rotate away from the face; the brow vents on the SAI Max-Vision with the Pro Shade on it slide up. The sliders work fine, but they're fiddly and slightly difficult to operate with gloves on. They're nearly impossible to move with the visor up.

There are my three little fiddly complaints, then – the short D-ring side of the chin strap, the narrow opening when the shield is up, and the brow vents. That's a pretty short list for an expensive helmet.

While I'm not planning on crash-testing this helmet, I will say that I feel very secure wearing it while I ride. It is sturdy without being bulky and feels snug and protective without causing claustrophobia.

The standout aspect of the Defiant helmet is its ventilation. There are nine intake vents – two on top; two on the brow; and the multi-function chin vent has five inlets. With the chin vent switch clicked to position one, air flows through the upper (long) slit vent, directing air up across the face shield to prevent fogging (although if you've installed the included Pinlock insert, this isn't terribly necessary). In position two, the four larger vents open too, rushing a huge amount of air into the interior of the helmet. There's a mesh backing behind the slits to prevent any wayward bugs from getting in, a nice detail that I really appreciate. Even on the hottest days and in stop-and-go traffic, enough air moves through the helmet to keep me comfortable.

Gushing about a helmet that costs more than \$700 isn't difficult. The Defiant Pro-Cruise is a superb example of a high-end, high quality motorcycle helmet and it certainly bolsters Arai's record of excellence.

**PROS:** Excellent and configurable ventilation; high quality, tough external finish; incredibly comfortable inner lining

**CONS:** D-ring side of the chin strap could be longer; brow vents can be hard to manipulate; difficult to don eyeglasses. ☹

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