

Back Support Belts

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Six choices that could save your spine on the street or in the dirt, but which is the best?



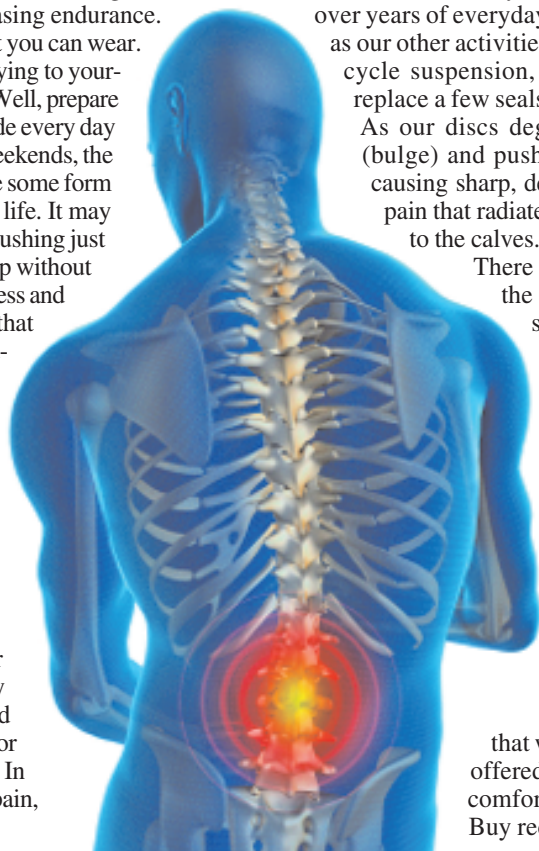
Left column from top: Back-A-Line Dynamic Support, Schiek 4006, Ergodyne ProFlex 1500; Right column from top: HRP Sports Impact Wrap, Triton KoolBak, HRP Sports Flak Wrap. Only two earned our coveted recommendation. Note that the following photos show the various belts worn outside jeans for clarity, but we typically prefer to wear them underneath belts and pants for greater comfort.

MOST MOTORCYCLISTS ARE a tough lot that refuses to give up riding despite chronic aches and pains, and who are constantly on the lookout for ways to extend their riding years. For back pain sufferers, back support belts can be a viable option, depending upon the severity of their condition. Properly fitted around the lower back region, a good back support belt can reduce pain by offering lumbar support and limiting movement of the lower spine—greatly increasing endurance. You might even consider them a backrest you can wear.

“But I don’t need one,” you may be saying to yourself. “My back doesn’t hurt when I ride.” Well, prepare yourself for the sad truth: Whether you ride every day or prefer to take long-distance rides on weekends, the chances are good that you will experience some form of lower back pain at some point in your life. It may only be temporary at first—the result of pushing just a little too hard on bad roads or a long trip without adequate rest intervals—but age, poor fitness and improper riding posture are all factors that can lead to chronic back pain even for riders with Herculean stamina. It can make riding a painful proposition, or worse, force a rider to hang up the helmet and leathers altogether.

The statistics are surprising: Low back pain affects up to 90% of Americans at some point in their lifetime, and over half will experience more than one episode in their lifetime. The condition is so prevalent that it is estimated that Americans spend approximately \$50 billion a year dealing with low back pain. It is second only to the cold as a cause of lost time at work, and it is one of the most common reasons for doctor’s office or emergency room visits. In the hierarchy of common neurological pain, only the headache is more prevalent.

Back pain is most often a symptom of disease or injury to the muscles, bones, and/or nerves in the spine. Whether they’re the millions of microshocks that aren’t even felt through our motorcycle suspension or more severe blows from striking potholes or bottoming out over large bumps, these jolts affect the discs, which are basically the shock absorber system for the spinal column. Unfortunately, the cumulative effect of the jolts we take over years of everyday riding and thousands of miles, as well as our other activities, can be severe. And unlike our motorcycle suspension, we can’t just pop out these shocks, replace a few seals, add fresh fluid and hit the road again. As our discs degenerate, they can become herniated (bulge) and push against the nerve roots in the spine, causing sharp, debilitating pain in the back, or Sciatica, pain that radiates from the lower back all the way down to the calves.



There are hundreds of back support belts on the market today, including motorcycling-specific styles ranging from basic motocross-style kidney belts to more substantial belts designed for long-distance road riding. Some motorcyclists believe that weightlifter-style belts are the best choice, while others swear that the utility-style belts, such as those worn by warehouse workers, are the hot ticket. So, we compiled six belts that represent the various styles of back support belts on the market today and put them to the test.

Our findings? When it comes to managing back pain, anything is better than nothing, but some models that we tested did stand out, and one of them offered just the right combination of support, comfort, fit and value to earn our MCN Best Buy recommendation.

Back-A-Line Dynamic Support

\$49.95

Back Support: ●●●●●●
Retention: ●●●●●●

Fit: ●●●●●●
Weight: ●●●●○

Comfort: ●●●●●●
Value: ●●●●●○

Overall Score: 56

Specifications:

Weight: 8.8 oz. **Retention system:** Hook-and-loop closure with additional cinch strap. **Lumbar support:** Patented, with channel relief for spine, full coverage; **Available Sizes:** XS–ZZ (48"+). **Warranty:** Unconditional 100% Satisfaction Guarantee. Made in USA.

MCN first presented the Back-A-Line Dynamic Support belt as one of our Innovations of the Month over a decade ago, in our June 2001 issue. The belt's basic design hasn't changed since then, and it hasn't needed to.

The Dynamic Support features a patented, rigid lumbar support pad that covers virtually the entire lower back area (see inset)—the only belt in this test to do so. This support pad is gently curved on the inside surface and provided with a channel to avoid direct contact with the spine. The pad's shape is designed to encourage the natural curvature of the lower back for proper posture while offering lumbar and kidney support.

The curved back area of the Dynamic Support measures 8.25" top to bottom at its tallest point. The belt is initially closed via a 4.25" wide strap that uses hook-and-loop material. An additional 2" cinch strap wraps across the abdomen, through a steel loop and



doubles back for added security and support and is also secured by hook and loop material.

We rate the Back-A-Line's lumbar support as the best in our test group by a huge margin. It's much firmer than the other belts in this test, but it isn't uncomfortable to wear for extended riding periods. The front portion of the belt is nicely tapered so that it does not pinch, bind or shift positions. The Back-A-Line's main material is a non-stretch, washable polyester fabric that is designed to be breathable,

reducing discomfort from sweat on hot riding days (for cruiser riders, Back-A-Line also offers a faux leather version for \$54.95). We were surprised at how dry the backside of our T-shirts were after removing the belt, and we rate its breathability second only to the vented Koolbak.