

Now Hear This • CUSTOM EARPLUGS

We all love motorcycling - The open road. The sun shining on your face. The wind. Now, here's the problem. Over the many years of riding, wind can take a toll on your hearing. Even when using a full face helmet, with shield down, there's enough wind noise penetrating to effect your hearing over time.

I've dealt with this situation by adding music to my ride. Installing an Autocom system with bike to bike communication and speakers for my iPod mounted right in my helmet. Sounds like the answer? Not really. Even when using those little disposable foam earplugs, I still get enough wind noise to drown out the music, not to mention constantly having to ask Brian to repeat himself because I can't hear him. There's a better way.

Enter Marilyn Navia, audiologist, of Now Hear This Custom Earplugs. Marilyn makes custom earplugs, molded directly from your ear to efficiently and completely cut out background noise while riding.

I'd seen Marilyn at several rallies throughout the years and always meant to stop and take the time to get this done, but you know how that goes. Finally, at this year's Americade I made the time, which really isn't that much time at all. Sitting down behind her table, she applied the material, similar to Silly Putty, into my ears. It's sort of felt like the air pressure building when going up or down in an airplane. All outside noise was cut out, and I sat in silence as the molding set, which only took about 5 minutes.

I had chosen custom plugs with speakers imbedded which would work with my Autocom system. This option requires overnight manufacturing, so off I went to enjoy the rest of the day. The next morning I picked up my new custom earplugs. After a brief instruction of how to insert, remove and clean, I took off for a day's ride.



The speaker earplugs being used with an audio system such as Autocom, J&M, etc. require an adapter, a small box, to be connected between the system and the earplugs. Once mounted, the Autocom plug goes into one jack and the earplug wires connects to the other. The earplug wire comes in two lengths; I had chosen the longer as this would give me a little more play when riding. Once I had figured out how to route the wire so it wasn't flapping in the breeze, I plugged it into the iPod and gave it a test. Prior to this, I had always had to crank to iPod volume to 11 in order to hear the barest of sound when riding at speed. I almost blew my eardrums out before turning the volume down to about 3. Even at this lower setting, I was hearing lyrics previously not heard. The music was crystal clear and, by using a separate volume controller available at Radio Shack, I was able to control the sound when stopped at lights, riding through busy street, or when using the bike to bike communications. First test scored 10+.

Now to riding. I knew that outside noise was pretty much gone just by inserting these little gems into my ears. We hit the highway and got up to 70mph. Still no wind. Excellent. Hit the push to talk button and wait for a reply. Absolutely crystal clear. No repeating, no "What did you say?" This alone would save time and possible mistakes or worse, as concentration is not removed from your riding and applied to trying to hear your riding partner's words. Test Two - a big 10+.

Now to the nuts and bolts. Marilyn and her custom earplugs can be found at all the major rallies throughout the country. If you're tethered and can't make it to at least one, give her a call. She'll find a local establishment to take the mold of your ear and send to her. She tries her best to find one that will do this at a reasonable cost and in a timely manner. If you're able to get to her at a rally, just put aside a half hour and plunk yourself down. Regular earplugs, sans speakers, can be had the same day, costing just \$55 for basic, and \$80 for filtered. Filtered plugs allow some outside noise through. This is beneficial when you don't want to use an adapter with your already installed helmet headset, or you may already be using a hearing aid. Custom plugs with speakers run \$170. These need overnight setting and can be picked up the next day. If you want the adapter for your system, and Marilyn carries one for just about every system, that is an addition cost, which varies.

My set up, all totaled, was \$225 and worth every penny and more. Whereas I was enjoying my riding while straining to listen to my music, I now revel in long distance travel with sound flowing through my helmet, crystal clear and non-invasive. Not to mention the benefit to saving my hearing, which I guess is the major reason to wear earplugs while riding. I've met too many long-time riders who never wore earplugs who are all but completely deaf. If you enjoy your riding, and your hearing, do yourself a favor and find Marilyn and Now Hear This and get a set of custom earplugs. You'll thank her.



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Backroads
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