



THE PATH TO STANDARDS

In February 1984, one of the monthly motorcycle magazines in the UK carried an advertisement for motorcycle suits “made to ACU Standard”. An enquiry to the ACU on how other companies could gain this accreditation revealed the advertiser’s claim was a lie; there was no ACU Standard and action was taken to prevent the claim appearing in print again.

Certain personnel within the ACU recognised, however, that the Standing Regulations for road-racers protective clothing - the ACU had merely adopted the FIM’s prescriptions - could be usefully improved. The text is at best ambiguous and at worst entirely meaningless. For example, it requires that: “The following areas must be padded with at least a double layer of leather or enclosed plastic foam at least 8 mm thick- shoulder, elbows, both sides of the torso and hipjoint, the back of the torso, knees”. The requirement for the shoulders, elbows and knees can be complied with simply enough. It is the requirement for the other parts of the body that raise a question mark over the effectiveness of the requirements. Read one way, it could be argued that the regulations render back protectors mandatory. Read another, few mass-production manufacturers comply with the requirement for double leather between the armpit and the hip. Anomalous, ambiguous, unenforceable and, of course, unenforced.

Motivated by the number of low-quality suits that were sustaining catastrophic failure during racing crashes - which at one point resulted in the ACU issuing an unprecedented ban on one leading European manufacturer’s suits - in 1988, the ACU established a technical subcommittee to prepare its own standard for racewear. Members of this committee included ACU personnel, scrutineers, medical experts and garment manufacturers.

However, no sooner had this group delivered the final draft of their document than the ACU decided not to publish it. The reason subsequently admitted was that the ACU had a fear that if a competitor sustained injury, they might be held responsible as the “accreditation body” for his suit. Far better for the ACU to require competitors to wear products accredited by another body - as in the case of helmets tested and certified to an official standard, for example.