

Cardo Scala Rider G4

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Price: \$399
strike.com.au

Communication has always been a difficult task for motorbike riders. Screaming through a full-face helmet can only get you so far. It's just as well Bluetooth was invented then, because the wireless technology seems purpose-built for riders.

The Scala Rider G4 is one of the most feature-packed Bluetooth headsets around, giving motorbike and scooter riders the ability to chat to a pillion passenger, other riders or take a mobile phone call. What's more, it has FM radio built-in and Bluetooth stereo (known as A2DP), which means you can enjoy music streamed wirelessly from your iPhone. The music playback feature works with just about any phone or player supporting A2DP. For those without an A2DP-compatible player, there's an MP3 line-in jack for a corded setup.

The biggest selling point for the G4, however, is its incredible range; you can chat intercom-style with another rider with the same unit up to 1.6kms away depending on the terrain. This is more than three times the distance of Cardo's own Q2 headset. To help achieve this feat, the G4 has a small flip-up antenna to extend its range.

The G4 attaches to the helmet via a special bracket, which can be clipped on using a clamp or stuck on with an adhesive back. It depends largely on the helmet you have, but we opted for the clamp, which was just thin enough to slide between the helmet's outer case and foam shell. It still intrudes a little on the interior padding, though.

The earpieces come with Velcro pads to stick them inside your helmet. If your helmet's padding presses right up against your ear, then the earpieces will be very uncomfortable. And pulling your helmet off will likely be pretty painful, too. Thankfully, our Shoei XR-1000 lid is designed with hollow areas around the ears, which is perfect for a headset system.

The downside is that with the speakers set a little distance away from the ears, sound quality becomes tinny, which is fine for speech, but lacks the oomph you want for listening to music. Again, the experience here will vary a great deal depending on the helmet design.

The noise-cancelling mic is attached to the end of a flexible boom, which is ideal for open-face helmets, but we would prefer the simple corded mic version for full-face models. It's less bulky and gives you more flexibility in where you position the mount. The corded mic mount is available as a \$77 upgrade, but we'd like to see this offered as an alternative bundle for the same price.

The Bluetooth module slides forward out of the mounting bracket so you can charge it via the AC adaptor away from the helmet. It's weatherproof, so light rain is ok, but you'd want to keep it away from a downpour. The battery will keep it running for 10 hours talktime and last 10 days in standby mode.

The G4 automatically adjusts the volume based on the ambient noise. It seems to step between two volumes, though; loud and soft. More gradations would help.

The G4 can conference between three motorbike riders or two couples on two motorbikes. It's full duplex as well, so you can all talk at the same time, unlike a walkie talkie. Those who use a GPS will be able to pair it with the G4 to hear the spoken instructions. However, it won't work with a mobile phone and GPS at the same time. To still be able to make and receive calls, the GPS needs to support Bluetooth handsfree, so you would pair your phone with the navigator.

It's a pricey headset, but for regular riders with a need to chat, it will be worth every cent.