

The Vertex Raptor-i Helmet Intercom: they can hear you now! Posted by H.McCoyon Sep 10, 2012 in Gear| 1 comment



*"Oh my gosh...I can totally hear you!"*

For a long time, helmet intercom systems have been a bit like walkie-talkies. Or ham radios. Funky old things with primitive technology that were fun when all the the stars were aligned, the weather was perfect, and you were pretty much right next to whoever you wanted to talk to.

Rider 1: "Can you (*kssshht!*) me?"

Rider 2: "Say again?" (*kssshhht!*)

Rider 1: "-an -ou —r -e? ....have to....(*kshht!*)...and then...(*kssshhht!*)...(blap-bloop!)...*kssshht.*

Rider 2: "What?!"...*kssshht!*

Yeah. You know what I mean. Then Bluetooth technology came along, and finally, granted you could decipher a set of directions that had been translated six ways from Sunday, you could tell your riding partner when you had to pee. Awesome, huh? Well, it's gotten even awesomer. I had a chance to try out the new Vertex Raptor-i Wireless Helmet Intercom while riding through Monterey and Carmel recently and, wow; they've come a long way, baby!

First of all, I should tell you that I don't advocate doing all the things the Vertex Raptor-i can allow you to do on a motorcycle. Then again, I don't advocate playing X-Box on-line, texting after two drinks, eating Taco Bell in the car, or any number of things other people seem quite capable of these days. But it *is* pretty cool. It's actually...kind of awesome. I'll get to those features later.

The first thing I tested was the helmet-to-helmet intercom feature.

Being able to easily communicate with your riding partner is a double-edged sword: it's great to be able to tell your partner something (I gotta pee, I'm hungry, cops ahead, whatever). On the other hand, it sucks that they can hear you (what the hell were you thinking, goddammit I said *left*, f'ing slow down, etc.). The Raptor-i catches every single word, in crisp, clear detail at an astonishing distance: up to 500 meters. Riding the Carmel Valley Road, my husband sped way ahead of me through the twists and hills and forest. He'd be way out of sight before drifting out of signal. I could tell, because I could hear his motor. That's the one drawback of the Raptor-i: the intercom is constant, not voice-activated. However, the sound and clarity was superb. Despite the fact that my husband never once warned me of a single-lane, blind hairpin turn on a cliff in the shadows (and there are many on that road), I could hear him downshift and accelerate, and came to rely on the predictable rhythm as a means of reassuring myself I wouldn't find him laying by the side of the road around the next turn. I have to admit though, I sort of wished I could tune out the sound of his engine. I like to hear my bike when I ride and after about a half hour, found

the constant sound of a second motor obtrusive. Though I've used other intercom systems that do have voice-activated (VOX) technology, the reception and clarity was no where near as good as the Raptor-i, plus, noise-cancelling technology means that when a rider speaks, background noise is minimized. So keep that in mind...your riding partner(s) will have no trouble hearing you swear.

Now, about the cool stuff that I won't use (but secretly want to). The Raptor-i can synch with your smartphone via Bluetooth, and it's easy to do. The simple directions had me synched to my iPhone in seconds. For music, I selected the Pandora app on my phone, found a favorite station, and voila!: crystal-clear tunes. Then, I had my daughter call me to test out the phone function. The Raptor-i will automatically answer after three rings, so you don't have to take your hands off the controls (but you'll pull over, right?). Your music or intercom function will automatically resume when your call ends. No, your riding partner won't hear your phone-call (synched helmets won't pick up another helmet's calls or music), and yes, you can tell the Raptor-i to ignore the call if you want. If your phone has voice-dialing, you can make calls with this system, too. The Raptor-i can also be tuned to your favorite radio stations or your GPS system. Basically, whatever app you have on your smartphone that talks or makes noise can easily be transmitted to your intercom. I tested the Raptor-i with both iPhone and Droid smartphones; same great results. Cool, huh? But yeah, more distraction than I'm comfortable with.

There are two other features that, for me, make the Raptor-i a standout: 1). The directions are simple and dependable. No confusion there. If you've ever tried a helmet intercom system before, you know this is nothing short of revolutionary. What a relief! 2). The controls are easy to manipulate with gloved hands. Volume controls are intuitive: top button for volume up, bottom button for volume down, phone in the front, power in the back, and the thumb-sized grooves make them easy to feel.



*Ergonomic controls on the Vertex Raptor-i are simple, intuitive, and easy to manipulate (the blue light lets you know you've made it through the directions).*

In conclusion, for a helmet-to-helmet system, the sound, reception, and range is superior, but there's no voice-activation (VOX) capability; I found the constant sound of another motor bothersome. However, if you're into multi-tasking (something I ride my motorcycle to escape from), you'll find the Raptor-i easy, ergonomic, and exceptionally high-quality. It's super-clear sound and super-easy-to-use features would be hard to resist on a long ride! The Raptor-i Helmet Intercom with FM (the version I tested), in both full-face and open-face versions, sells for \$228 (that's Singapore dollars; about \$185 USD)\*, and is available to order directly from Vertex at <http://www.vertex.com.sg/> (\*shipping is via DHL Express and runs about \$24 USD for one unit, \$31 for two).