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Vertex Raptor-i Helmet Communication System Review



Ken Aiken - November 26, 2013

The Raptor-i from Vertex does all that's expected of a top-quality Bluetooth helmet communication system, and a bit more. The lightweight control unit fits onto the side of a helmet using a very strong type of hook-and-loop fastener that is claimed to be secure up to 130 mph. The control unit has four large buttons with an LED indicator in the center. High- and low-pitch audio signals indicate when connections and mode switching are made. The Raptor-i can be "paired" with up to three units, but only two

can be in open communication at a time and the initiate button is used to switch between them.

The in-helmet audio system simply plugs into the control unit. I tested the boom mic with helmet speakers (included) and with ear buds (add \$23). The later includes three different sizes of silicon plugs to ensure a comfortable fit. The boom mic works fine with both modular and open-face helmets, and the speakers simplify the process of putting on/taking off the helmet. However, the ear buds insulate wind noise and thereby clarify reception.



This is not a VOX system: riders are in full-duplex constant communication, which means that wind noise and other ambient sounds are transmitted even when you're not talking. The Raptor-i features digital signal processing (DSP) technology, which does an excellent job of muting wind noise, although it still can be heard. Automatic gain control does help to counter variations in ambient noise, but factors like a full-face helmet vs. an open-face one; quietness of the helmet; degree of wind protection provided by fairings/windshields, and the speed

the motorcycle being ridden are mitigating factors.

Vertex claims a range of 500 meters (1,640 feet), but this is a line-of-sight communication system: go around a building or over the crest of a rise and you will lose the signal. Linked to

a Bluetooth compatible cell phone the Raptor-i allows voice dialing, automatic call answering after 3 rings, call reject, call redial, last number redial, call transfer and an independent phone-volume control. It also will receive audio directions from a Bluetooth GPS navigation unit and automatically switches off to accept an incoming phone call, then resumes when the call is ended.



The Raptor-i has a built-in FM radio with memory for 8 stations and volume control that's independent of other functions. With compatible Bluetooth A2DP music players, functions like switching tracks and adjusting volume can be verbally controlled. Music switches off while a phone is being used.

The RTR-RC-01 Remote Control Unit (\$77) is an innovative option. It attaches to a handgrip and, using infrared transmission, duplicates the switches built into the control unit. It's less distracting to use the remote and your hand stays on the bars.

The Raptor-i does everything its higher-priced competitors do, while suffering the same limitations, as VOX vs. full-duplex speaking modes simply comes down to personal preference. Having the choice of wired-in

microphone or boom and helmet speakers or ear buds is a competitive advantage. The charged battery is sufficient for 10 hours of continuous usage and will store a charge for a month. An optional "continuous charge system" was not tested. Control unit with FM radio, wall charger, helmet speakers and microphone (wired or boom) is priced at \$187.

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