

## Thoughts on Five Years with my Aerostich Roadcrafter

Where were you in February 2000? I was confidently in my second year of law school, coming into my own as a club roadracer, and dissatisfied with the First Gear Kilimanjaro jacket that I had been wearing day in and day out for three years.



“The Aerostich is a bit confusing the first time you try to put it on.”

The Kilimanjaro jacket was serviceable enough, I guess, but it lacked in several areas. For one, build quality was less than perfect- the materiel was paper thin in the unreinforced sections and the seams were only single stitched in most places. Also, the armor was laughable- cheap foam with dubious protective qualities, although I did go down in the jacket once with no injury. Lastly, the generic look of the Kilimanjaro said nothing about the rider’s status in the motorcycling community other than “this is all I wanted to spend on my riding gear.” With the crew I rode among on Sunday mornings, nothing gave a rider credibility like a dirty Aerostich with a zillion miles on it.

So I bit the bullet and called up Rider Wearhouse (<http://www.aerostich.com> or 1-800-222-1994) and ordered a suit, along with a clear map pocket for my arm. The customer service was great, and I received my suit about a week later.

The fit was perfect, after I figured out how to get the thing on. After a few practice runs in the mirror, I was able to get the suit on in 12 seconds. I’ve never been able to do it in under 10, as promised in the catalog. Maybe if I greased myself up, but then I’d be too distracted to ride.



“But once you figure it out, it’s no more difficult or time-consuming than putting on a heavy jacket”

Andy Goldfine developed the suit in the Midwest, but it’s perfect for San Francisco Bay Area weather. You can wear it with a fleece underneath for most days of the year, or add an electric vest for the chilliest times. When it’s over 90 degrees, the minimal venting does make it a bit uncomfortable unless you keep your t-shirt soaked for that swamp cooler effect.

I took to my ‘Stitch like Jerry Lee Lewis to underage girls. The suit quickly molded itself to my body’s contours and I made the decision to wear it whenever I got on a motorcycle, no matter how short the trip. That decision was vindicated six weeks after I got my suit, when a Honda Accord turned left in front of me not 100 yards from my apartment! I managed to scrub off enough speed to avoid any injury to myself or my even more valuable suit, but if it had been a higher-speed crash I would have been well-protected in my new suit of armor.

The big test came in November of 2000. I was on my way to the Sunday Morning Ride in Marin. I passed a guy I knew from the Ride at about 70 mph as I headed up a sweeping left hand turn on the way to the Golden Gate Bridge. “He sure is going slow!” I thought to myself before I realized I was flying into a turn slick with what I think was black ice.

My Aerostich held up quite well as I raced my SV 650 to the Jersey barrier. The nylon proved to be especially slippery as I passed the spinning SV while sliding on my back going uphill and slammed into the concrete barrier at about 40 MPH.

I wasn't wearing my back protector, like a dummy, but my elbow and knee both bounced hard on the pavement with no ill effects thanks to the TF2 armor Aerostich thoughtfully provides in the knees and shoulders. You can get back and hip protection for an additional charge.

The armor, a "viscoelastic material first developed for use in aerospace applications" actually firms up when it is hit, distributing and absorbing energy more effectively than other applications, according to the Aerostich website. It is so good that Aerostich eschews CE-approved armor for not being able to do the job as well.

The problem with the TF2 armor is that it ages, and not gracefully. As it is exposed to extremes of hot and cold it hardens and softens and after a couple of years it starts to crumble and fall apart. Because of this, I decided to purchase TPro Molded Armorflex armor for my elbows and knees. It fit almost perfectly in the Aerostich's armor pockets and is as unobtrusive as the TF2 armor.



"I haven't crashed in T-Pro armor, but I can't think of anything better for when I do."

During my 70 mph get-off, I melted the 1050 denier fabric on the knees almost to the 500 denier fabric underneath. The 500 denier fabric on my ass was ripped away, but the second layer of the same material underneath held up enough to avoid burning my tushie. Another advantage of crashing in an Aerostich is the ease with which emergency workers can remove the suit- although I rarely hear injured riders arguing when an EMT starts to cut his leathers off to avoid aggravating a hideously twisted limb!

After the crash I shipped the Aerostich back to Minnesota for a repair estimate. They called me after a week with the news that my suit was totaled! They generally don't fix suits if the repair exceeds more than half of a new suit's price, and to replace all the damaged panels would have been over \$300 dollars. I convinced them to just repair the seat and knee for about \$200.

A week later I had my suit back. The seat was replaced, with marked color fading apparent in the contrast between the original material and the new seat section after just one season of riding. The knee was also replaced, which was cheaper and easier than

replacing one of mine. The repair was perfect, other than the non-matching colors, which you would expect from a factory repair.



“Four years later, you can still see the differences in fading between the new and old materiel used in the repair.”

After about 18 months of everyday use, the zipper pulls started to fail. This would manifest itself at the most inconvenient times, like when I was late for work and the main zipper would just come off of its track at the bottom as I was getting ready to hop on my motorcycle. Aerostich thoughtfully provides a replacement kit for around \$12, and I would recommend having one handy. But after I replaced two or three zipper pulls, the teeth started to fall out of my right-leg zipper. I took it to a luggage repair place, and they put in a coil-type zipper you might find on a very durable rolling suitcase. This has worked very well for the last year, although it usually jams because of the smaller teeth.

Another area the Aerostich is weak in is waterproofing. Rider Wearhouse recommends using some kind of seam sealer along the zippers, but I just use two coats of Scotch Guard water repellent spray after each washing. (Yes, I do wash my suit!) This will keep you dry for about 25 minutes, and then you get Aerostich Crotch.

Aerostich Crotch is what you have after you take your suit off after a healthy soaking. Your crotch is dark with water, like you just wet your pants. This is OK if you're getting home from work, but if you arrive at work like that you look a little crazy. Would you buy a car from a pants-wetter? We all like to think we're so open-minded, but there are limits.



“Here I am getting ready to wet my pants.”

Speaking of limits, the Aerostich definitely has its limits of usefulness. First, it billows and flaps at very high speeds- over 100 mph, and this slows you down. I always ride faster in leathers, whether on the track or the street, as I can feel the drag the flapping nylon produces. This shouldn't be a problem for most riders, but when you ride an underpowered, fairing-less bike, you need every mph you can get to keep up with your friends on faster machines!

The 'Stich is also of limited use when it gets very hot. Even with the front zipper halfway down your chest and the underarm vents open, you start to feel like you're in a greenhouse when the temperature rises over 100 degrees. Especially if you're stuck in traffic or waiting at one of those two-minute long suburban stoplights.

But in cold weather the Aerostich is in its native environment (the factory is in Minnesota). The Gore-tex material does its job well, allowing perspiration to evaporate while keeping cold and rain out. I can comfortably ride a bike with no fairing in 35 degree air with only a fleece and light electric vest under the suit for hours without passing out from the cold.



“It is stained and soft from age, but it is still as waterproof, warm and protective as it was when it was new. So you can do anything, but lay off of my Blue ‘Stich Suit.”

The quest of every motorcyclist I’ve met is to have the perfect motorcycle that will do everything. So it’s natural that we want a suit that does it all as well. The Aerostich Roadcrafter is the closest thing I’ve found so far to the perfect riding outfit. And judging by the numbers of veteran riders with these things, I’m guessing I’m not the only one who thinks so.

My only real complaints about this product are the weak zipper hardware, poor venting and less-than perfect waterproofing. But I understand why the venting and waterproofing are the way they are, as the suit must be quick and convenient to don and remove so the rider will wear it every day. Judging by my suit’s level of wear, I’d say mission accomplished! It’s the sort of thing I’d want to be buried in- even if it looks like I already was.



“This pocket is big enough to fit a Buell XB12S.”

#### Gabe’s Likes and Dislikes:

##### Likes:

- As easy to wear as a jacket alone
- Very protective and warm
- Quality, made-in-USA construction

##### Dislikes:

- Zippers should be designed to last 10 seasons, like the suit
- After 20 years they should be waterproof from the factory
- Venting is not up to modern standards