

Equipment Review

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HJC CHATTERBOX FRS Helmet Communicator

Model: Multi-Sport +

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Looking for a great accessory to enhance your motorcycling pleasure? The HJC Chatterbox helmet communicator is by far, the best money I've ever spent on any motorcycling accessory! How many times have we all jumped on our bikes with a bunch of friends and driven hundreds of miles in total silence. Never being able to share the scenery real time, or warn riders behind you of road hazards, or tell someone you desperately needed a pit stop! The HJC unit allows you to really have interactive motorcycling and in my opinion adds a distinct level of safety and confidence in being able to communicate real time with others in your group.

What it consists of is a universal mount, which is relatively easy to attach to your helmet (no, no holes to drill!). Different packages support full face or open face helmets. The unit itself slides on and off the helmet mount in about 2 seconds so you can lock it up if you leave your helmet locked but exposed while parked. It operates on the "Family Radio System" (FRS) band spectrum which was allocated a few years ago for non-licensed, low power usage. One distinct plus on FRS use is that you can go to BEST BUY or a host of other places and buy an FRS walkie talkie or pair relatively cheaply (\$40-50/pr depending on quality and features). This would allow someone in a vehicle riding with you to also communicate 2 ways direct to your helmet. The FRS system will easily allow you 1/2 mile plus range, but if you can see the other rider (referred to as line of site) you can get 1.5-2 miles range from it.

The unit has 2 ways to activate a transmission. One way you can use a handlebar mounted PTT (push to talk) switch, or the unit is really designed to be activated by the sound of your voice (known as VOX activation) and has a knob on the unit to control how sensitive the VOX is to picking up noise. Adjust it too sensitive and you'll kick it on if you really crank on the throttle! The only other knob on the unit is volume control. A sliding switch controls what channel you transmit on. There are two channels on the unit, or you can select an intercom mode where you only transmit to your passenger but not to other nearby radios. The basic unit comes with microphone and earphones, which you install in your helmet. HJC and other helmet manufacturers are now putting little pockets inside where your ears are, so my speakers installed in seconds! The microphone gets velcroed to the front of my full face helmet and has a little windscreen that covers it. The unit is waterproof as witnessed by John Reimann and myself one day as we both took total drenching on a return from Augusta area one day! The units never skipped a beat and we were able to complain about the weather as we drove through it! I do need to say that the accompanying documentation is fairly poorly written and illustrated. Thankfully, the units are very simple and easy to setup.

Some other interesting features of this little unit are a rider hookup, which requires you to purchase another microphone/speaker kit and an extension cable which plugs into the passenger port on the unit. For you techno savvy types, an IBM compatible PS/2 mouse style connector is used for the driver and passenger ports on the radio. Another interesting feature is the ability to "feed" audio INTO the unit. With the right option cable, you can plug a Sony walkman or CD player etc into this unit and listen to music, which gets cut off when you or the passenger talk or you receive an incoming transmission. I tried this at my daughter's urging, but personally found the radio noise too distracting as I drove (I enjoy listening to my machine anyways...). The basic unit also comes with a recharging unit for the internal battery (charging time about 10 hours). I bought mine at Street Cycles and noticed they had replacement batteries on the shelf with other accessories.

Now you're wondering... "How much is all this gonna cost me?" A good question. Since I bought mine during the summer of 2000, you'll need to factor that in. The unit itself was \$170, additional helmet speaker/mic kit was \$25, passenger cable was about \$15, and the Walkman input cable was about \$8. So, for just over \$200 I have a complete intercom and bike to bike communications system (money very well spent). HJC also makes a separate headset/mic so you could use your communicator for other purposes and perhaps in conjunction with an FRS walkie talkie.

I will say again... "This is some of the absolute best \$\$\$ I've spent in motorcycling." It has greatly enhanced my enjoyment of being able to share the ride with my passenger and other bikes with radios, my wife has followed in the car and been able to communicate. I have received helpful warnings about road hazards from a bike in front of me, and been able to warn those behind me. I highly recommend this unit folks. And a little background on myself... I hold the highest class of amateur radio license there is (Extra class). I own several radios... one of them cost more than the first new car I ever bought, but when I'm on my bike, the Chatterbox is the "best radio I own"!

Happy and safe riding all.
Don Lockhart

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