

BusinessWeek

Up Front: PRODUCT PIQUE : A HEAD-ON COLLISION OVER BIKE HELMETS

MAKERS OF BICYCLE HELMETS are butting heads with Consumer Reports, which claims some helmets can come off in falls because of faulty buckles on the chin straps. In the June issue, the consumer's bible finds defects in 11 helmets (price range: \$30 to \$135), including Bell and Giro brands. They all use plastic buckles from ITW Nexus.

Sure, Consumer Reports periodically gets flak from makers of products it pans. But now, helmet makers and ITW are marshaling independent laboratories and even the feds to pressure the monthly magazine to reverse itself--the first time in memory this has happened, the mag says.

The Snell Memorial Foundation, the leading tester for all kinds of helmets, attacks the story. Harborview Injury & Research Center, which unlike Snell does no work for the industry, examined 3,390 bike crashes and found that three buckles came apart. Meanwhile, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission's tests find no Nexus buckle failures. Yet Consumer Reports stands by its story, saying many of the failed buckles came from a batch made last September. That points to broader quality-control problems that may recur, it believes.

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