Sports
Suit Yourself
Introducing the wearable air bag that makes motorcycle racing a survivable sport
By Anthony Effinger

> David Hanig knows about crashing things. While housesitting in 1998, he drove his rich uncle's Ferrari 348 TS sports car over an embankment and into the Connecticut woods, Ferris Bueller–style. "I totaled it," Hanig says. To make matters worse, he was working as a rookie analyst at a Greenwich, Connecticut, hedge fund at the time and a colleague passed him on the side of the road surrounded by police. "Those guys have not stopped making fun of me to this day," he says.

Hanig suffered four more crashes just last year. But he was ready for those wrecks: Racing motorcycles on twisting asphalt tracks at 150-plus miles per hour, Hanig has to court danger if he wants to win.

During the week, the 38-year-old buys and sells high-yield debt at R.W. Pressprich & Co., a New York–based brokerage that's been around since 1909. On weekends, he zips himself into a $5,000 leather racing suit and straddles a $70,000 Bimota DB5—one of six bikes he owns—and rips around tracks from New Hampshire to Florida, going ever faster by pouring his Wall Street salary and bonus into engines, tires and

Once risky, high-speed falls like this are now eminently survivable.

fuel. "Racing is a huge cash flow negative for me," Hanig says. Last year, he burned through $1,200 on gasoline and $4,000 on tires in a single weekend at the Daytona International Speedway in Daytona Beach, Florida.

David Terry, director of strategic planning at Wieden & Kennedy, a Portland, Oregon–based advertising agency, got into motorcycle racing after a near-lethal flu virus scarred his lungs so severely he could no longer huff along on his custom carbon and titanium bicycles. Now, he's got the moto bug so bad he's selling components from his high-end stereo system to buy a first-class racing cycle. In November, he attended a workshop at California's Sonoma Raceway to learn how to rip through turns at maximum speed—the crux of the sport—without crashing.

For Terry, racing is pure Zen. While in motion, motorcycles are at their most stable and quiet at maximum speeds. "At 140 miles per hour, the bike is at peace," Terry says. "To be that relaxed while going that fast is what's addictive about it."

At Hanig's level—he placed second in an American Sportbike Racing Association competition at Daytona in October—it's more about dueling with other riders, all of them leaning hard into turns to maintain speed. Lean too little, and you'll never win; lean too much, and your bike slides out from beneath you.

What makes such calculated recklessness survivable is the

Onboard electronics tell the Dainese D-air to inflate before the racer hits the road.

advent of suits with air bags in critical spots: along the collarbone and over the shoulders. These self-inflating compartments, driven by compressed gas, make it possible to fall off your bike and walk away without a scratch. The 6-foot-2-inch-tall (1.88-meter-tall) Hanig races in a Dainese D-air, the Ferrari of suits, right down to its Italian heritage. It has three accelerometers, three gyroscopes, a GPS and onboard electronics that synthesize all that data and tell the D-air to pop before the racer hits the road.

The problem for American riders is that you can't buy a Dainese suit here. The U.S. Federal Communications Commission must approve the electronics in the suit first, says Vittorio Cafaggi, strategic development manager at Dainese SpA in Vicenza, Italy. He hopes the D-air will be on the market by the end of the year.

Hanig bought his first of two D-airs abroad in 2011. It's literally been a lifesaver, he says, and it's never inflated in the absence of a fall. Wieden & Kennedy's Terry covets one, for sure: "The ad for it should be, 'If you're going to spend $20,000 to kill yourself, you might as well spend $5,000 to save your life.'"

Hanig walked away from all four of his crashes in 2013. His all-time worst was at the New Jersey Motorsports Park in Millville in 2012, when a competitor clipped his back wheel in a turn. Hanig went down hard, dislocating his shoulder. The D-air would have prevented even that injury had he not also been run over by the other rider, he says.

To start racing like Hanig, one must first get certified by an approved training program, such as the Penguin Roadracing School, which operates out of the New Hampshire Motor Speedway in Loudon, where Hanig cut his teeth, and then complete a "rookie race." You don't have to win the race, just finish it.

During preparations for his rookie race in Loudon, Hanig for the first time decided to put racing tires on his bike. In a truly novice move, he didn't heat them with warmers, as racing tires require. Cold and hard, the tires didn't have the proper traction and he crashed. He had to repeat the whole class.

Hanig has come a long way since then. He started a team called RawSpeed Racing in 2012 with two other racers; he calls the team an "incubator" for people who want to go faster. And for the past five months, he's been writing checks to mechanics in Florida to rebuild two of his bikes from the ground up. In all likelihood, he'll crash them in the very near future.

"Crashing is part of racing," Hanig says. "If you're not crashing, you're not trying hard enough."