

# TANK GRIP PANELS COMPARED



Tech Spec's Gripster Skin panel on the Super Hawk



Stomp Design's panel on the Super Hawk

**B**ODY ENGLISH IS an important element of riding technique, ranging from dramatic hanging-off at racetrack velocity to supporting the pressure of a passenger during braking. Skilled riders utilize their lower body strength to relieve their arms of the weight-bearing chores. Unfortunately, the main surface available for a rider's thighs to grip is a beautifully smooth, rounded and waxed gas tank!

Obviously, you know where this is going. Anyway, we were able to find only two companies currently making solutions to this age-old problem. Their products are quite different, but both are quite effective at giving riders' thighs adequate traction in their struggle to provide stability.

Stomp Design offers a range of StompGrip panels for both dirt and street machinery. For the most popular bikes, pre-cut panels are available. For the rest, Stomp supplies generic shapes that can be refined by the end-user. Our Honda SuperHawk fell into the second category, and qualified for the "Universal Sportbike" kit (\$39.95). StompGrip pads come only in clear, and are bedecked with neatly spaced rows of dimpled bumps. At first, the texture seems harsh, but it isn't pleasant to touch. And with a layer of denim or leather between skin and grip panel, there's absolutely no discomfort.

Tech Spec's Gripster Skin panels are available for both on- and off-road bikes, in a variety of textures in either black or a featureless clear version called "Ice Grip." For the SuperHawk, we ordered the Gripster Sport kit (\$34.95), which includes one square sheet of the grip panel material and eight paper patterns to fit popular sportbikes. You trace the appropriate pattern (or one of your own making) on the back of the sheet and then cut it out yourself. We chose "Laser Etch," a pattern of small interlocking shapes, each with extremely fine (barely visible) grooves cut into it at an angle different from those of its neighbors. This makes each shape reflect light differently. In direct sunlight, the pattern is dramatic, with individual shapes taking every color from silver to black. In more diffuse light, the pattern is hardly noticeable. It feels like the thin, rubberized coatings on some cameras and other high-tech hardware, simultaneously silky smooth and extremely grippy.

We were warned by Tech Spec that the clear Ice Grip panels could look a little foggy on some solid colors, such as the red of our test bike. They sent us a small sample of the Ice material, and the fog factor was very minimal. Though far from invisible, the black panels can add to, rather than distract from, a motorcycle's appearance. But those riders who want their tank graphics to show through, or who prefer "slightly foggy" to the "big black spot" look, should go with Tech Spec's Ice line or a StompGrip pad.

Installation of both brands is the same in terms of basic procedures: a) Trim the panels to your liking (you may be pleased with the StompGrip shapes sans modification), b) Thoroughly clean the

tank surface, c) Warm the tank surface and panel with a hair dryer, and d) Carefully apply the panel by peeling off a small section of its backing and pressing it against the tank, slowly removing the rest of the backing and smoothing out air bubbles. Both manufacturers recommend allowing considerable time for the panels' respective adhesives to set up (12 hours for the Gripster Skins, 24 hours for the StompGrip) prior to riding. Both brands were easy to cut with heavy-duty household scissors, but trimming the StompGrip panels was made more difficult by the way its bumps restricted the choice of lines. Tip: Drawing a shape on a piece of paper pressed against your tank can be very frustrating because paper refuses to conform smoothly to compound curves. Try

a paper towel instead; it's much, much easier.

Once on, the StompGrip and Gripster Skin panels performed as advertised, and provided greatly improved body control, regardless of riding gear. Really, these things are a revelation—one of those items that, once you try it, you'll never want to be without again. With extended use, we developed a slight preference for the Gripster Skins because they never snagged folds in the fabric of our pants during small movements, unlike the bumps on the StompGrip panels. On the other hand, we can imagine the StompGrip panels providing a small measure of additional confidence in extreme riding situations, such as racing.

We find the most important distinction between these two is the difference in their adhesives. The StompGrip panels are essentially permanent installations. They can be removed (with some effort and solvent), but not reused. The Gripster Skins, however, use a truly remarkable and highly innovative adhesive that allows them to be peeled off and reused multiple times. They leave no residue on the tank, and require no special treatment, except to be kept clean between applications. Simply stick them on a sheet of wax paper for safekeeping.

Either product will serve you well, but for our money (and five dollars less of it, at that), we'll take the Tech Spec Gripster Skins. They feel better, look better to our eyes, work every bit as well in the vast majority of conditions, and allow for easy removal and transfer. Now go out and get some! Don't spend another minute riding without them, whichever brand you choose. ➡

by Mark Barnes

## RESOURCES

Tech Spec—2377 Mormon Island Dr., El Dorado Hills, CA 95762; (916) 941-6606; [www.techspec-usa.com](http://www.techspec-usa.com).

Stomp Design Unlimited, Inc.—15431 Chemical Ln., Huntington Beach, CA 92649; (888) 612-5240; [www.stompdesign.com](http://www.stompdesign.com).