

STARTECH

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I

Concern over Camp Startech Helmet The Camp Startech helmet, which first appeared on our shelves over a year ago, has been in many ways the success story of the lightweight helmet revolution. Light, stylish and comfortable to wear it easily outsold the competition. Customers were disappointed when supplied dried up toward the end of last year and it was announced that a new model would go into production this year.

As the most successful model on the market the Startech was expected to be a key element of the BMC's helmet testing programme, which is being carried out at Leeds University. However despite appeals to both the importer and the manufacturer the BMC was not able to directly obtain any samples of the original Startech for testing. The BMC was however able to obtain one relatively new sample from a member. This was tested at Leeds and the results have raised serious concerns regarding the level of protection offered by the Startech. The Leeds test revealed a peak impact force of 18.6kN, which is well above the 10kN maximum allowed by the EN standard and more than twice the 8kN maximum allowed by the UIAA. This would not give the user sufficient adequate protection against rockfall.

The immediate question that faced the Technical Committee was "is this a one off? Is it a batch problem, or has it aged?" A detailed examination of the helmet and comparison with others on the market have led the Committee to the opinion that the design itself is in question and that insufficient impact absorbing foam has been incorporated into the helmet. If this is the case the helmet does not offer sufficient protection against rockfall from above. This view was put to Camp who made the following statement:

"CAMP has been supporting the BMC programme of testing of lightweight helmets. Our Startech helmet, one of the newest and most innovative helmets on the market in recent years, has been included in this programme.

At the time of its introduction, the Startech helmet was tested to the prEN 12492 by an officially recognized testing house, and the helmet obtained the CE certification.

Recently we have been advised by the BMC that an old model Startech was tested at Leeds University, giving a peak impact force result in excess of the Standard requirement. The test was on a single, used helmet manufactured about 12 months ago. This issue has been carefully evaluated by our Technical Department and the following are our comments.

During the past months, as per our usual processes of constant monitoring of all our production, we have carried out detailed checks on the manufacturing and assembling process of the Startech helmet: in particular, we have carefully examined the foam crown which is attached on the top inside of the shell. We have found that the manufacturing process of this foam crown could not guarantee to obtain for each item exactly the same density, therefore even the shock absorbing capacity may vary significantly.

We have also noted, once again, that the interpretation of the CE standards as well as the actual way of carrying out the tests may be different from one test house to another, and such differences can affect the test results.

Therefore, based upon the information received from the BMC, and based upon the above comments, we feel that there is not enough information to say whether a course of action has to be taken or not, as we believe that the Startech helmets currently on the UK market do give good protection to the user.

In the meantime, CAMP is undertaking further research regarding this matter and will continue to work with the BMC.”

The Technical Committee does not feel that this response properly addresses its concerns and in a bid to gain further evidence is asking climbers who own Startech’s to send them to the BMC for testing. Owners will be reimbursed for any helmets tested. If you own a Startech bought prior to May 2000 and would like to offer it for testing then please contact Andy MacNae. New redesigned Startech’s appeared in the UK in June. It has more foam than the original and tests carried out at Leeds show that it meets the EN standard and compares very well with other similar lightweight helmets.

Important note: The Technical Committee feels that helmets such as the Startech have had an extremely positive impact on climbers use patterns and the Leeds programme is playing an important role in supporting the development of these products. Wearing any helmet is better than none at all and in many rock climbing situations the old Startech could give an excellent level of protection. However the Tech Committee would not recommend this model for use in the Alps or other regions where rockfall is likely.

II

Following an excellent response to the BMC’s news release regarding the Startech helmet (see Concern over Camp Startech Helmet in Skills & Safety section) sufficient samples of the old (pre May 2000) Startech have been received for a full set of tests to be carried out. These tests have confirmed the original results with top impact forces ranging between 18 and 20+kN. This clearly demonstrates that the old Startechs do not have sufficient foam to absorb the energy of an impact to a satisfactory extent. It also reinforces the Technical Committee’s recommendation that the helmet is not suitable for use in environments where there is a risk of rock or icefall. Camp have responded to the testing results with the following statement:

“CAMP has had the opportunity to read the BMC’s Technical Committee statement regarding the Startech Helmet on their website: in particular, most attention has been paid to BMC’s comments to our statement.

We have fully understood BMC’s concerns about level of protection given by the Startech helmet, and we are willing to respond to their concerns; still we agree and confirm that, as the BMC’s says, such helmet is giving, anyway, a good level of protection.

However, if any UK climber is not confident with their helmet as they do not feel that it gives enough protection, we are prepared to upgrade the helmet to the latest specification by replacing the inner foam crown.

Our UK distributor, Allcord Ltd., is available for any further information: please contact them at enquiries@allcord.co.uk”.

The modification suggested will essentially upgrade the old Startech to a new Startech. Tests on the new model show a transmitted impact force similar to that observed with other lightweight helmets and within the EN standard.

The Startech tests were part of the BMC’s helmet testing programme, which has now completed its first phase. For all the results and a comprehensive review of helmets see the forthcoming issue 19 of Summit (September).