

**Parliamentary Road Safety Committee
Inquiry into Motor Cycle Safety**

Submission



Submission No. # 33
Received
Road Safety Committee

I wish to make the following submission relating to motorcycle road safety. I have held a motorcycle licence for many decades having obtained it as a teenager in the 1960's but had not ridden for several decades until I recently returned to motorcycling about five years ago.

I am an active member of Netrider (www.netrider.net.au) where I am active in organizing a regular car park practice session to teach inexperienced riders basic skills and roadcraft techniques to try to keep them alive while they gain the skills needed to ride safely in traffic.

In essence, I see motorcycles as requiring a greater degree of skill to master than a four wheeled vehicle and in essence I see it as a matter of luck as to whether or not learner riders encounter an emergency before they actually acquire the skills to be able to deal with that emergency. Within the motorcycling community it is said that new riders start an empty bucket of skill and a full bucket of luck and they need to fill the skill bucket before they empty the luck bucket and my humble attempts to assist learners is my attempt to swing the odds slightly more in their favour.

Driver Behaviour

One of the major issues for motorcyclist is the behaviour of drivers. Motorcycles are not seen by cars and while the reasons for this are complex, it is almost certainly not because motorcycles are smaller than cars or that they “come out of nowhere”. More simply drivers see what they want to see and simply don't see bikes. There are also plenty of examples of drivers who do see bikes but decide to impose their vehicle into the bike's space because the bike will be forced to give way.

Greater driver education to look out for bikes is needed as part of the driver licence education. In fact one single issue which would save cyclist from undue stress if not injury would be teaching drivers to do a head check, that is turn their head and look rather than just relying on mirrors with their blind spots, before changing lanes.

While at first glance, the view that car drivers are a serious risk to riders may seem to be a biased viewpoint, it should be remembered that this view is widely held by motorcyclist and that in the vast majority of cases the motorcyclists who hold this view are also car drivers.

It needs to be remembered that many of the collisions that occur between cars with little more than cosmetic damage to the vehicles involved, can be an accident with serious injuries once a motorcycle has been substituted for the car. Accordingly any strategies

that help the separation of cars and motorcycles will result in an improvement in motorcycle safety.

Use of Bus Lanes

One such strategy can be allowing motorcycles to use bus lanes. While bus lanes have been created for the express purpose of giving priority to public transport, it is unlikely that motorcycles would have any negative impact on buses because of both their fewer numbers than cars and their ability to accelerate rapidly, especially compared to a bus. There are a number of freeways with bus lanes and allowing motorcycles to use these would put them into a separate lane from cars.

Filtering

In general, motorcycles can accelerate from a stop faster than cars. Consequently a further strategy for separating cars and bikes is to allow bikes to filter (that is ride in the space between cars) to the front of traffic at red lights, so that on the green light motorcycles can create a gap between them and cars. This strategy will not only improve safety of motorcycles it will also improve traffic flow which will be a win also for car drivers. It should be noted that filtering is legal and works in a number of European countries including UK and a number of states in the USA.

While there is a theoretical risk of motorcycles being involved in accidents while filtering, there is an equal risk, probably with greater consequences, of motorcyclists who do not filter being struck from behind in rear end collisions by motorists who fail to see them. These do occur currently in the same way that drivers rear end each other, but as stated earlier the risk of injury is greater when it is a motorcyclist who is hit.

The legality of filtering in Victoria is at best questionable. While there is no specific law against it and road law does allow a vehicle to pass a stationary vehicle, motorcyclists are often at the mercy of the attitude of police who may or may not determine that this behaviour is a breach of road law. The bottom line is that motorcyclists already filter; they are rarely involved in collisions while filtering but they do risk prosecution for doing what is not only sensible from a perspective of traffic flow but also to ensure their own safety.

Road Conditions

A major issue for motorcycles is road conditions. While some things, such as wet surfaces, are beyond control. Others are a direct result of sloppy road maintenance practices. When road repairs are carried out loose gravel, which can prove fatal to motorcyclists, is regularly not cleared off the road, presumably because it is cheaper to allow cars to clear it over time. Motorcyclist pay a high registration fee, often as much as cars and more, relative to the damage they cause to road surfaces. We should be entitled safe roads on which to travel. There needs to be greater enforcement that after road works the road surface is restored to a safe condition which will not endanger motorcyclists.

Training

I have already mentioned my involvement in training so it should come as no surprise that it is an issue dear to my heart. The problem is that any formal training is usually expensive. One solution to this is to provide greater assistance to volunteer trainers. This for example could be in the form of:

- provision of training to those who volunteer to train others;
- assistance with provision of suitable training sites
- grants to existing organizations/businesses which provide training to lower the costs of training and make it more attractive to motorcyclists
- development of training syllabuses which could be made available to volunteer organizations.

Statistics

From time to time there has been an almost hysterical reaction to motorcycle accident statistics. While any road death is a tragedy, especially to the family and friends of the persons involved, motorcycle accident statistics are regularly treated differently to other road accident statistics.

Some months back there was a rise motorcycle accidents over the previous year, this was commented on by Senior representatives of Victoria Police who stated that it was unacceptable and something needed to be done and blitzes were conducted in many of the places motorcyclists like to ride at weekends. Months later when a similar rise occurred in car related deaths the press and police were silent.

The issue is that motorcycling deaths are statistically low numbers and consequently any variation will result in proportionally large. While the number of motorcycling deaths for 2010 was higher than the previous year, it was not significantly higher than the average over the last ten years or so. Further, simply looking at raw figures for deaths fails to take account of the significant increase in both bike registrations and bike licences. On any realistic measure of deaths as a proportion of licences held or bikes registered, motorcycle related deaths have fallen significantly.

While we should strive to reduce any form of road accident trauma as much as possible, a simple knee jerk reaction to an increase in motorcycle accidents in a single year is not a rationale answer to resolving the long term road toll.

Greater Need to Consult

Many of the issues relating to motorcycling are unique to riding. I sincerely believe that it is difficult for non-riders to make sound judgments concerning the safety issues of riders without experiencing the issues facing riders first hand. I would like to encourage the committee to find out more about riding by learning to ride or at least taking a ride as a pillion passenger. If they are not prepared to do that then at least they should not make judgments about motorcycling without thorough consultation with the motorcycling community. Failure to do this leaves motorcyclists feeling disenfranchised and dissatisfied with our Parliamentary representatives

Should the Committee have any questions or wish further elaboration on anything I have raised I would be pleased to provide further information

David McAuliffe

