



Klaus J.E. Clemens

Submission No. # 43

Received
Road Safety Committee

Ms Kylie Jenkins
Executive Officer
Committee Secretariat
Inquiry into Motorcycle Safety
Spring Street, Melbourne 3000

Wednesday, 10 August 2011

Dear Ms Jenkins,

RE: Motorcycle Safety my Journey

I recently met with the local member Mr. Murray Thompson MLA and discussed my experiences and perspectives on motorcycle safety issues and was encouraged by him to make a late submission to the Motorcycle Safety Inquiry.

I purchased my first motorbike in 1992 at the age of 44 after having a frightening near miss with a petrol tanker sharing my lane while I was on a bicycle –and deciding I needed to improve my odds of surviving on the road when enjoying two wheels.

I should explain as an engineer and as a safety expert in transport, particularly railway accidents; I approached the exercise with forensic interest being aware of some of the statistics but none of the risk factors to do with motorcycling on the road.

Fortunately I had good advice and undertook the HART rider training course which began my education and skill development to become a safer rider. I was particularly pleased with the lecture by the police motorcyclist giving his practical advice to the newly qualified Learner Riders at the end. After purchasing a LAM legal bike, I was working in NSW at the time; I discovered how clumsy and ignorant I was in properly controlling the bike. Another break was to join the excellent Ulysses social club where I was offered lots of advice, 98% wrong and sometimes dangerous by the way, by the other members but being an observant rider I noticed some riders clearly had a lot more control than others at a I speeds and conditions –this interested me greatly. The next good luck I had, as in I didn't die, was low speed single vehicle accident on a country road breaking my collar bone and being fined for negligent riding. Of course there was much fascination at work in the "safety expert" having a serious accident. A search of books on the topic showed a dearth of knowledge. Then I commenced the four level course of the California Superbike School at Philip Island which caused controversy amongst my peers because they saw it was a motorcycle race school course and I as a bike control course.

The course material and instructors explained how difficult it was to ride a motorbike well, that it was counter intuitive and that you had to deliberately manage the limited amount of attention available to stay in control i.e. Safe. With the work I was doing at the time with Dr. Mark Wiggins of Macquarie University in Human Performance of railway employees I was able to correlate the teaching of the riding course with issues around workload management.

Since that time I have been fortunate to locate a motorcycle design book explaining the assumptions and approach designers make to different style of bikes. Most interestingly I discovered that the road motorbike designer assumes, to get the best performance from the bikes handling and breaking, that the rider does not grip the handlebars tightly, that the rider is gripping with their knees so that their weight and Centre of Gravity is low and as one with the bike, that the rider is pushed back on the seat and not up against the tank etc. All of which again correlated with what was being taught at the ride school.

I was always puzzled every time I went passed a pub on weekends by the large number of motorbikes out front and wondered how they got home safely when I would have a sandwich and a coffee and get home exhausted. Well it turns out a great many of them did not get home. When I had a motorbike in NSW the RTA would provide with the registration renewals little rider safety updates explaining the risk factors and what the prevalent motorbike accidents were. At that time there was a high prevalence of single vehicle accidents particularly after lunch on weekends!

To assist the inquiry I have collated my further views under the heading of the relevant terms of reference:

(c) the attitudes of riders to safety and risk taking including drugs, alcohol, travelling at inappropriate speeds, use of protective clothing and fatigue;

I was aware of how dangerous motorcycling is compared to driving a car but was unaware, or misinformed, on the contributing risk factors to be managed. The emphasis on speed by TAC & Policing misrepresented the risk profile; fatigue and alcohol are much greater risks, where a momentary lapse of attention at any speed can be deadly. The existing advice on alcohol is insufficient for motorcycling and misrepresents what is a safe amount of alcohol.

The question raised in this item is “risk taking...” by motorcyclists. Few people would consider horse riders as risk takers but horse riding¹ has been cited in literature as being more dangerous than motorcycling. Like horse riding motorcycling for me is a leisure-sport activity where I choose to accept some risk because of my great love of the machine and the ride. I choose those risks over being a vulnerable cyclist.

(g) countermeasures used in Victoria, Australia and other comparable overseas jurisdictions to reduce the number and severity of motorcycle accidents with reference to road environment treatments, behavioural change programs and the design and technology of motorcycles and protective gear;

I have the opportunity to ride extensively in NSW and Victoria. My own experience is that I am more likely to be pulled up and have a discussion with police in NSW than in Victoria, in fact I have never been spoken to in Victoria but I have had a speed camera fine through the mail, the conversations with police have had a greater and more lasting influence on my riding behaviour.

I ride motorbikes that are far more capable than I am as a rider. Braking and turning a motorbike involve many more timed, measured and sequenced actions than the same operation in a motor car. My abilities as a rider are the determining factor in staying safe and the safety gear is there to mitigate the results of an incident. It is obvious to me that there are people who should be discouraged from riding because they appear not to have the coordination skills, situational awareness or concentration abilities to operate a motorbike safely –I saw these same people pass the Learner Rider Test.

In summary I have found that my safety on the motorcycle improved when:

- I realised what a constantly high task workload riding was which when compared to my experience of landing a plane or sailing a yacht in difficult circumstances.
- Riding a motorbike safely was counter intuitive to common first responses to stress e.g. gripping the handles when scared reduced steer ability. Needing to accelerate, not brake, in corners to improve steer ability.
- Designers of motorbikes assume certain riding styles that affect the performance of a bike that is not general knowledge.
- Human Performance issues are paramount in the rider's ability to ride safely. Anything that reduces alertness reduces your ability to stay safe e.g. alcohol, fatigue, dehydration.

I trust my personal insights as a rider with no other involvement in the industry are of some assistance to the inquiry.

Yours truly,

Klaus J.E. Clemens
MBA (Technology)
BEng.(Manufacturing)
Dip.App.Sc.(Chem)
Member IEAus

¹ Australian Injury Prevention Bulletin No. 24, May 2000