

Submission No. # 08
Received
Road Safety Committee

From: <[REDACTED]>
To: <rsc@parliament.vic.gov.au>
Date: 10/07/2011 09:58 PM
Subject: Submission for Inquiry Into Motorcycle Safety 2011

Murray Thompson MP,
Chair of Road Safety Committee.

Dear Mr Thompson,
please find attached my submission into your
Inquiry Into Motorcycle Safety. I will send the original submission by
post.

Yours sincerely,
Trevor BERGMAN

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**The Executive Officer
Road Safety Committee
Parliament House
East Melbourne Vic 3002**

Inquiry Into Motorcycle Safety - Submission

I have a Victoria motorcar and motorcycle licence and have been driving for over 25 years. I have driven all over Australia in that time and drive over 20,000 kilometres a year. I have received advanced driver training for both motorcars and motorcycles.

Motorcycle riders are extremely vulnerable when involved in a collision with either other vehicles or when they hit a fixed object. Therefore it is imperative to reduce the number of collisions involving motorcycles, which can be done in a number of ways. My submission covers most of the Terms of Reference.

The first is to reduce the speed at which motorcyclists exceed the speed limit by. Excessive speed is a major cause of collisions for motorcyclists. Speed cameras can take photos of speeding vehicles both going away and going towards the camera. The more likely a person is to being detected and fined, then more likely they are to obey the speed limit. At the moment motorcyclists are over 50 percent less likely of being detected speeding by speed cameras as they have no front number plate or stickers with their registration number shown. Their rear number plate is so small that it is harder for them to be read by a camera even if a photo of the motorcycle speeding is taken from the rear.

I have found that a lot of motorcyclists, especially Harley Davidsons, have number plates with a black plastic number plate cover around them. These covers make it even harder to read the numbers and letters on the plate, especially the first and last number and letter which is closest to the side of the plate and nearest the black plastic.

The inquiry should ask the Police Traffic Camera Office the statistics for how many motorcyclists are detected speeding each year and out of that how many are not given penalty notices due to not being able to identify the number plate. The committee should inspect photos taken of motorcycles that cannot be read or are front on for themselves. Don't be misled by being told by the Police that not being able to fine motorcyclists is not a problem and is only a small proportion of the overall number of vehicles detected speeding. The proportion is over half the motorcycles detected are not prosecuted. Ask for the percentage of motorcars detected speeding and how many are not prosecuted due to not being able to read the number plate. Compare that percentage to that for motorcyclists and the difference will be huge, which is a major reason for motorcyclists crashing at high speed.

The Motor Cycle Riders Association and most motorcyclists do not want front number plates re-introduced. They say the metal ones on the old bikes were dangerous and it is too hard to retrofit stickers to existing motorcycles. Being able to getaway with not being fined may also have something to do with it, as well as avoiding toll roads. The solution is simple and that is to mandate all motorcycles registered in Victoria after a certain date, such as the first of July next year must have the number plate number on stickers on the front of the motorcycle. Manufacturers would easily be able to incorporate that into the design of motorcycles.

Gradually over years more motorcycles will have front registration numbers and the likelihood of being detected speeding will increase. There will then be a marked reduction in the number of motorcycles detected at 20 kph or more over the speed limit such as there was for motorcars when the speed cameras were introduced in 1989. With that reduction will come a reduction in the amount of collisions for motorcycles as there was for cars. The reduction in the road toll for motorcyclists since 1989 has not changed much. In 1993 43 motorcyclists died, and yet for the last 5 years the average has been 44 a year. Concentrating on detecting and prosecuting speeding motorcyclists by Victoria Police will reduce the toll as it did with motorcars. Being able to identify the motorcycle from both front and rear is imperative in achieving this reduction.

With the Victoria Police increasing their use of Automatic

Number Plate Recognition technology, being able to correctly read number plates from both front and rear is imperative to enable this new technology to detect motorcyclists without licenses or who are disqualified or suspended. These people are known as Un Riders are far more represented in road toll statistics than law-abiding motorcyclists and being able to remove them from the roads will reduce the road toll.

Victoria mandated Electronic Stability Control on cars without it being an Australian Design Rule and can do the same by requiring motorcycles to have front number plate stickers. The Federal Government has now mandated ESC for all new cars Australian wide. If Victoria required front number plate stickers on motorcycles, then it would not be long before it was a requirement Australia wide.

The next thing to do is remove the allowance for number plate covers or surrounds for all motorcycles. This is easy to do and only needs an addition to the Road Rules – Victoria. To stop motorcyclists complaining, this requirement for no number plate covers could be extended to all vehicles.

I have found that to get a motorcycle licence you do not have to ride on the road at all. L-plates are given out without the need to ride on the road. P-plate riders also do not have to ride on the road for their test. For both L-plates and P-plate licence or full motorcycle licenses, an on-road component must be mandatory. This will obviously cost more as it will be one on one riding, but an instructor riding behind and observing a person going for their licence or permit on a pre-determined course with defined parameters would be far better than the current system. An instructor could then see if the licence or permit applicant has the road sense and ability to be safe on the road, and can explain any problems. This would stop the situation now where after the licence or permit is granted off-road, the rider is allowed on the roads. This does not happen with learning to drive a motorcar, with a learner now having to have 120 hours of driving accompanied by an instructor. A learner motorcycle rider should have at least 10 hours supervised riding from an instructor riding with them before they are allowed unsupervised riding. The committee could enquire with riding instructors what amount of hours would be needed, but a minimum should be set. Road craft cannot be taught in the classroom or from a

small bitumen training ground.

Anti-lock Braking Systems and Traction Control have been incorporated into Electronic Stability Control for motorcars and made mandatory in Victoria and now Australia. The committee should look at the same requirement being for all new motorcycles registered in Victoria after a certain date to have ESC. ABS would be an absolute minimum. As motorcycles need balance on the part of the rider to keep them upright, then any time a wheel loses traction such as skidding on a painted surface or on wet or greasy roads the ability of the rider to stay upright is compromised. Having ESC would reduce the circumstances where a motorcyclist will lose control of their motorcycle, such as ESC does for drivers of motorcars.

Reduce the time taken for Vic Roads to respond to reported faults and poor road conditions. Currently if a person rings 13 11 70 to report a fault the phone is eventually answered and an employee from the control room logs the problem. This is not an accountable system. The current system should be upgraded to ensure that a toll free number is used and recorded so an audit trail can be used to trace what action has been done in case the road condition leads to a collision. Motorcyclists are very vulnerable to poor road conditions such as blocked drains, potholes and oil on the road. If these problems are not rectified by Vic Roads as soon as possible, they can lead to collisions. With the certainty that they are accountable for the conditions of the roads for reported faults by the public, Vic Roads would be more likely to respond in a timely manner. Certain time parameters could be set such as already exist with the Vic Roads contractors to fix problems with traffic lights. At the moment, drains are rarely cleaned until they block up and flood the road. A timeframe of less than an hour to respond would reduce the likelihood of motorcycles and other vehicles having accidents when roads flood. Preventative maintenance may be brought back by Vic Roads rather than waiting for things to go wrong. Other time frames could be set for potholes and oil on the road. These time frames should be the same for Council local roads. Vic Roads should have responsibility for contacting Councils if they receive notification of problems on local roads from members of the public.

Speedometers on motorcycles should be restricted to only display speeds up to 160 kph. At the moment they can display huge speeds such

as over 300 kph that are not legal to ride anywhere in Australia on public roads. By having a display only up to 160 kph the graduations between each block of 10 kph would be much larger and easier to see. The temptation to see how fast the bike can go will be reduced. Once a person riding a motorcycle is detected going over 160 kph, any defence they had that they didn't know how fast they were going would be negated by the fact they were already 50 kph over most legal speeds anyway. This requirement could be extended to all motor vehicles to stop any suggestion of bias against motorcycles and could be implemented in Victoria only if needed such as has been done already with ESC.

The Transport Accident Commission as a way to encourage motorcyclists to wear protective gear should more readily advertise Kevlar motorcycle pants and jackets. At the moment these are not as well known as leather gear but are far more practical once a motorcyclist completes their journey. Some commercials showing Kevlar's effectiveness when a crash occurs and how they can be worn without people knowing they are for motorcycles would encourage their take-up. A possible subsidy by the TAC for Kevlar gear would assist.

Vic Roads should examine whether wire rope barriers are effective at stopping a motorcyclist who is sliding or whether they will go under the barrier or hit the pole holding the wires. If it is more likely a rider will go under a wire rope barrier then tests should be conducted to show if wire rope barriers with strands down to ground level would increase the safety of motorcyclists by preventing them from passing under the barriers and would actually stop them better than Armco railings. Vic Roads should then increase the use of wire rope barriers with wire down to ground level if tests show this is safer with increased publicity that this is the case to stop the negative thoughts about wire rope barriers a lot of motorcyclists have. Calling wire rope barriers Slice and Dice would be a thing of the past.

With new technology available the Committee should enquire into the use of airbags for motorcyclists to assist them if they are involved in a collision, in just the same way that airbags help people in motorcars sustain fewer injuries.

With regards to the roadworthiness of motorcycles the current

system of roadworthy certificates being needed upon transfer or if Police determine if one is needed is I believe sufficient. A more proactive campaign by Vic Roads or the TAC to show what constitutes a bald motorcycle tire would be appropriate as motorcycle tires are different to motorcar tires which most people are used to. This would be beneficial to the majority of Police who inspect motorcycles but have no motorcycle licence. As it is far more imperative for motorcycles to have roadworthy tires this education campaign would have benefits for reducing skidding on wet roads by motorcyclists.

The eyesight test for motorcyclists should be reviewed and an eyesight test should be required at each renewal of their licence. A qualified optometrist rather than a Vic Roads employee should do this test as a qualified optometrist can detect eyesight defects that could lead to problems for the motorcyclist being able to see clearly. Motorcyclists have no windshield wipers as motorcar drives do and require their vision, which deteriorates with age, to be the best possible when riding. If motorcyclists say they are being unfairly treated, the same eyesight requirements could be extended to all licence holders of all vehicles.

I am more than prepared to attend any hearings the committee may hold and answer any questions they may have or expand on any of my submissions.

Yours Sincerely,

Trevor BERGMAN