

TRANSCRIPT

ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into motorcycle safety

Wangaratta — 29 November 2011

Members

Mr A. Elsbury

Mr T. Languiller

Mr J. Perera

Mr M. Thompson

Mr B. Tilley

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Witnesses

Mr G. McCoy, and

Mrs J. McCoy.

The CHAIR — Welcome, Greg and Jenny McCoy, to the Victorian Parliament's Road Safety Committee's inquiry into motorcycle safety. We have received some 72 written submissions since releasing the terms of reference. What we seek to do is to obtain further evidence from selected witnesses. We thank you for your attendance here this afternoon. Anything you say before the committee now has the benefit of parliamentary privilege, not that I expect anything highly contentious to be raised. You will have the opportunity to peruse your remarks and to make any necessary typographical corrections. I ask observers to keep movement to a minimum and mobile phones turned down.

What I invite you to do, Mr McCoy, is to speak generally about your experiences as a motorcycle instructor, the accident that you had, your recovery and any insights that you would like to put on the parliamentary record that might help us in our deliberations on ways in which we can improve motorcycle safety outcomes against a range of criteria.

Mr McCOY — My experience riding motorbikes started when I got my motorbike licence at 18. I rode for a few years and then did away with the bikes while I raised my family. I got back into riding motorbikes again in about 1996, and I loved it from then on. I have always loved bikes — just the freedom of riding them. After I had ridden for a while I was asked to become a motorcycle instructor, which I said yes to because I had my certificate IV in workplace training and assessment. I agreed to become a motorcycle instructor at DECA, which is a motorcycle and car driver training complex in Shepparton. You may have to excuse me because the accident I had has affected my speech a little bit, so it could sound a bit slurry at times.

The CHAIR — That is all right. Perhaps at this point tell us what happened to you.

Mr McCOY — The actual accident happened on 3 August 2003. A few mates and I decided to go for a trip to Beechworth for a coffee, basically. We left on Sunday morning from where I live, which is just out of Shepparton, basically through Wangaratta and then on to Beechworth, and we were coming across the Warby Ranges apparently — I have no memory of it — which is just out of Wangaratta when I ran off the road, apparently. Basically all I can remember then is that I woke up in hospital — how many days later?

Mrs McCOY — About four weeks.

Mr McCOY — Four weeks later, yes, and my recovery has been since then. Basically that is where I am now. I do not ride a bike anymore, because I have a few issues with balance. They are probably some of the things that I needed to ride a motorbike, for sure. Any questions?

Mr LANGUILLER — We do understand that you were a motorcycle instructor. Can I take you back to the time when you were instructing pupils, as you would call them.

Mr McCOY — Yes.

Mr LANGUILLER — What steps did you take to make sure that they learnt to ride safely? What was your advice? What were the tips that you gave them?

Mr McCOY — Yes. We had to follow a regime, I would imagine, of teaching motorcycle skills to students where they obviously had to wear the approved motorcycle helmets. But we stressed to them, as far as the actual motorcycle training goes, that they should wear all the protective clothing. It is not required because it is not mandatory, and that is one of the things I am a bit disappointed in. Only the helmets are mandatory; all the other clothing is optional. That is why you see people riding around with thongs on. They will have a helmet on, but they will be in shorts and thongs.

Mr LANGUILLER — Do you think that would have made a difference in your case?

Mr McCOY — I used to ride with the proper jacket, the gloves — proper gloves — the proper boots, so I imagine it helped me in the accident I had.

Mrs McCOY — It definitely did. They said he would have been paralysed or worse. His jacket reinforced it at the back to protect his spine, which kept it nice and strapped.

Mr McCOY — Yes, I had all the, what they call, armour: the elbow, the shoulder, the back armour. But that is not mandatory. As far as motorcycle safety goes I would stress that certain types of jackets with armour,

boots, gloves should all be criteria. They have to match an Australian standard, and you cannot ride a motorbike unless you have those pieces of equipment. I would stress that.

Mr TILLEY — Greg, are you saying that protective clothing should be made mandatory?

Mr McCOY — Mandatory, just like a helmet; you have helmets, gloves, jacket and boots.

Mr TILLEY — So it would be fair to say from what you have told us this afternoon that you put into practice what you imparted as an instructor?

Mr McCOY — I did, because I used to teach motorcycle training, and as part of the motorcycle training we used to show videos of accidents. Of course people who ride bikes with thongs, shorts and no gloves come off far worse than those who wear protective clothing.

Mr TILLEY — We appreciate the direct result of your crash and those injuries on your memory, so we want to try to discuss in brief if you can recall what protective clothing you were wearing. Would you wear the same protective clothing every time you rode your motorcycle as you were wearing on that day?

Mr McCOY — Yes.

Mrs McCOY — He always did.

Mr McCOY — The jacket, the gloves, the boots.

Mr TILLEY — When you went to a retailer to purchase that protective clothing as a motorcyclist was there a particular standard or quality you chose?

Mr McCOY — I used to read the motorcycle magazines, and obviously certain types of clothing were recommended.

Mr TILLEY — When you say ‘recommended’, was that just through advertising or because of something — —

Mr McCOY — It could be 50-50. It could be just to sell the product, but then you would have to factor the safety into it as well. If you knew it had a lot of safety factors, you would purchase it.

Mr TILLEY — That was a big part of your consideration when buying your — —

Mr McCOY — A big part.

Mrs McCOY — We did. We definitely looked for reinforcements — mesh top —

Mr TILLEY — I know it is going back nearly 10 years, but when you purchased your safety equipment what sort of costs — —

Mr McCOY — The jacket was about \$350. Obviously you can get cheaper ones and you can get ones that are a lot dearer, but I had to factor in cost and safety, so I took a middle-of-the-road approach.

Mrs McCOY — It was a lot of money back then, but we decided it was safety first. I remember buying it.

Mr TILLEY — We have heard from other witnesses about the cost of protective clothing over the choice of operating a motorcycle. Do you have any thoughts in relation to that, because it may be cost prohibitive to purchase particular safety items?

Mr McCOY — I do not think it is, because a person will go out and buy a \$20 000 bike and wear a cheap helmet, thongs and shorts. But really it is only a toy. People do not go and buy a bike because they have to buy a bike. There might be a bit of cost saving on fuel or something like that, but you are still laying out a lot of money. People who join a golf club are only playing golf for recreation, but they will spend a lot of money on the best available clubs, the best shirt, the best hat, the best shoes, because it is all part of — —

Mr TILLEY — The whole package.

Mr McCOY — The whole package, the whole scene.

Mr TILLEY — Just in relation to your comments and your view in relation to mandating protective clothing, do you have any other thoughts about encouraging riders to ensure that they are appropriately dressed when operating a motorcycle?

Mr McCOY — It should be the law. There should be a minimum standard on helmets and an Australian standard. There should be an AS on jackets, boots and gloves; there just should be.

Mr PERERA — Greg, after your accident, what sort of assistance did you receive from the TAC? Were there any challenges, and can you elaborate on that?

Mr McCOY — Yes, they have been unreal. They have been great actually. Jenny can probably tell you a lot more about the assistance that the TAC gave, but I have been very happy with their assistance. I had a caseworker up until probably three years after I had the accident. Then she dropped off because I did not need that caseworker any more.

Mr PERERA — Do you want to add anything, Jenny?

Mrs McCOY — They were very good. Probably the worst time is when the accident actually happens. That is when you need somebody to assist you, but that probably goes for all accidents anyway. I found them pretty good. I had no problems. They always answered our calls and kept us up to speed.

Mr PERERA — They covered all the medical expenses — physiotherapy and stuff like that?

Mr McCOY — Yes.

Mrs McCOY — Yes, they did.

Mr McCOY — Because of my accident I suffered double vision. They have been happy to assist me with spectacles, eye tests and all that sort of thing.

Mrs McCOY — We could not complain, really. They have been very good.

Mr ELSBURY — Just in relation to the accident itself, are your mates able to tell you whether or not it was a corner that you took or whether it was just a straight piece of road and something happened?

Mr McCOY — They could not tell me because when we were riding there were three bikes, and I was the lead bike, but I was too far in front of the others for them to see what happened. So far as I know, there was no other party involved; there was no other car involved; there was no other bike involved. It was just out of Wangaratta. The area is notorious for kangaroos, but I am only surmising.

Mrs McCOY — We have no idea.

Mr McCOY — As a motorcycle instructor I probably would not have caused the accident. I do not think so, anyway.

Mrs McCOY — Absolutely.

Mr McCOY — Because I had a pretty nice bike, and I was very scared to even try to mono it; I was scared.

Mrs McCOY — He loved his bike.

Mr McCOY — If I lost control, then — there it goes.

Mr ELSBURY — It would be like one of us doing something in the Road Safety Committee.

Mr McCOY — Yes, exactly.

Mr ELSBURY — Should I ever hop on a bike, I am not exactly going to thunder down the road, throw a mono and then — —

Mr McCOY — That stuck with me, because being a motorcycle instructor I did not know whether it was my fault or whether people would think it was my fault, because I think people have preconceived ideas about people on motorbikes. I say, 'I had my accident on a motorbike', and they say, 'Motorbike?'. Fair enough. They have less protection around them. A car has a shell, but a bike does not.

Mr LANGUILLER — Can I ask you why you rode? What was your — —

Mr McCOY — The freedom. The breeze in your face. It was just the freedom, because when you are riding a motorbike — with the particular bike I had — you feel a part of it. You feel like the bike is not there and you are just navigating your way through mountains as if the bike was not there at all.

Mr LANGUILLER — Would you promote bike riding, and would you encourage others to ride?

Mr McCOY — It is a pleasure thing. I always used to think, 'It's really only a toy'. It was only a pleasure activity. I would not go out and encourage people, only if was part of their job — if they had to be a postie or something like that.

Mrs McCOY — That is only because your accident changed your mind.

Mr McCOY — I probably have different views now, but I have always had the view that you have not got the protection around you. If you are riding down the road, just cross the intersection and get T-boned in your car by another car, it is a dint in the door. If you are on a bike and you get T-boned by a car, you are the one that comes worse off. In a car you have four wheels on the ground; you cannot lose balance. On a bike you only have two wheels.

Mr LANGUILLER — Is motorcycling dangerous or are the car drivers dangerous?

Mr McCOY — No, I think bikes are harder to see. They are only a flash sort of thing. A car is a big body of steel, and you can see it. A lot of bikes, because they have not got the surface area on them, need to be painted bright or something like that. They cannot be seen as easily.

Mr PERERA — What are your thoughts about filtering and lane splitting?

Mr McCOY — I used to lane split myself. I have two views on that. I do not like it because of the fact that you have a registered vehicle basically splitting in between cars. But as far as easing congestion goes, yes, I would recommend that.

Mr PERERA — Which is filtering past stationary cars, is it?

Mr McCOY — I beg your pardon?

Mr PERERA — You are talking about when the cars are stationary?

Mr McCOY — No, even on the highway. It is when they are slow, or that sort of thing. I used to do it anyway. If I were wanting to get up in front of the cars at the lights, I would slowly make my way through the cars.

Mr PERERA — That is okay.

Mr McCOY — It is probably not okay, but being a bike rider I probably thought it was okay. But when I became a motorcycle instructor, I had to try to tell people it is a no-go, because people open car doors and things like that. I could turn around and say no straight away, but as far as easing congestion goes I would say yes.

Mr PERERA — But you are against filtering; you do not recommend filtering.

Mr McCOY — Yes, I am against it.

The CHAIR — Just before we have some final questions from Mr Elsbury, I want to ask a question in terms of the actual cause of the accident. You were travelling on the road and you were leading the pack. I was not sure if you thought there may have been a kangaroo somewhere.

Mr McCOY — It is notorious for kangaroos. People have said they saw a flock of birds fly up around about the time I had the accident. They are saying I could have been hit by a bird or something like that. I do not know. There were no witnesses to what happened.

The CHAIR — Just in terms of your own perspective — my colleagues, I think, have canvassed it a little bit — if you had your life over again, would you have gone to Beechworth for a cup of coffee on that day? That is the wider question of ‘Would you have taken up a different sport, focused on your waterskiing or taken up golf instead of motorcycling?’.

Mr McCOY — No.

The CHAIR — You would do it all again?

Mr McCOY — I love the bike so I would have gone. It is like anything. You will hop in your car tonight, go wherever you are going and you will think, ‘I am not going to have an accident’ or it is not on your mind anyway, but it could happen. You are not thinking about it.

Mr ELSBURY — Thank you for your submission and also the evidence you have provided here today. Because you are obviously feeling quite passionate about the inquiry itself, what specific outcomes would you like to see from these deliberations?

Mr McCOY — Like I said, mandatory protective clothing other than helmets only. It has to be helmets and a jacket. I am not too sure about pants, because they make pants that are Kevlar woven that look like normal jeans. Obviously helmets are mandatory anyway, but jackets should be mandatory, gloves should be mandatory and boots should be mandatory.

Mr LANGUILLER — Can I just pursue a question? I am not a rider, so I do not know; I am asking you from a genuine position of a lack of knowledge. But if it is 35 or 40 degrees and you are wearing a jacket and it is made compulsory, given your experience would wearing a jacket in itself not perhaps become an issue in terms of riding, safety and ability to manoeuvre the bike? May not that jacket, in itself, on a very hot day become an issue, given your experience? It is a real question and not a leading question.

Mr McCOY — I know what you are saying. It is about being uncomfortably hot and having to wear one. But jackets now have material that breathes. When you are on a motorbike and you are actually riding into the air, it is actually cool. The only time you get hot is when you stop and wait at a set of lights, or something like that. But when you are riding along, and it might be 40 degrees, you can actually ride along fairly comfortably. The protection on the gloves is mainly on the outside but the inside can be mesh where it allows air circulation. I do not think it is going to be an issue or should be an issue. If people want to ride bikes, they have to wear mandatory gear with it.

The CHAIR — Before we conclude, Mrs McCoy, do you have any comment to make in what might improve motorcycle safety in Victoria?

Mrs McCOY — I do not think so. I think it is what Greg says about the way it should go. Perhaps people getting their licence may be able to get a certain amount of money to go and purchase jackets or something to encourage people when they first start to ride a motorbike or when they get their licence.

The CHAIR — So are you saying to subsidise support for safety equipment?

Mrs McCOY — It might be the way to go.

The CHAIR — Good, thank you very much for your time, Mr and Mrs McCoy. You will get a copy of the Hansard transcript. Have a look at it for typos and then send it back. It will then be published on the Web and form part of our material which we will look at when preparing our report.

Mr McCOY — Can I ask a question of you now?

The CHAIR — Yes, you can. Whether you get an answer depends on whether we are politicians or statesmen.

Mr McCOY — You are not a rider. Who are the bike riders here?

The CHAIR — Here and there.

Mr McCOY — What you think of mandatory protective clothing?

Mr TILLEY — I would like to comment on it, but we are still having public hearings.

The CHAIR — We will take that question on board as an open question. That is something we will be working on and we will be putting our thoughts on that in writing and reporting to the Victorian Parliament. You will be getting a copy of that report, and you can mark that question at this time and you will see our answers in due course.

Mr LANGUILLER — This is not politicians supporting the question.

Mr McCOY — It is not question time.

The CHAIR — It is a question of statesmen observing parliamentary protocol.

Mr McCOY — Fair enough.

Witnesses withdrew.