

TRANSCRIPT

ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into motorcycle safety

Bairnsdale — 14 December 2011

Members

Mr A. Elsbury

Mr T. Languiller

Mr J. Perera

Mr M. Thompson

Mr B. Tilley

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Witness

Mr I. Sanders, owner, Ride-Tek Motorcycle Training Academy.

The CHAIR — Mr Sanders, I welcome you to our hearings in Bairnsdale today and thank you for giving your time to attend. Just by way of general background the Victorian parliamentary Road Safety Committee is undertaking an inquiry into a number of measures which may improve motorcycle safety in Victoria. My name is Murray Thompson. The deputy chair is Mr Telmo Languiller. Andrew Elsbury is a member of the committee who got his motorcycle riding learners permit recently, and he is giving us a bit of insight from that perspective; and Bill Tilley has both a police and a military police training regime behind him in terms of motorcycle skilling.

You will get a copy of the transcript of proceedings today. You may correct any typographical errors and get it back to the committee, which we will then place on the committee's website. You also have the opportunity to give any evidence in camera or in private should you wish anything to be off the record, so to speak — something that is not published on the internet or web — that you feel should be drawn to our attention. The person who will be writing our report is Mr John Aliferis, who is our researcher here.

We have had a brief discussion just beforehand. We are happy to work with you, but I invite you, if you would like, to open the batting and contribute your thoughts on motorcycle training, which is your area of expertise. We can ask questions of you as well, if that would be of assistance to kick-start your contribution.

Mr SANDERS — I apologise because I am not used to speaking in this sort of format. I usually have a bunch of students in front of me, and I know what I am talking about; they do not. If I fumble through a few things — —

Mr ELSBURY — Do not worry; we are in a similar situation right now.

Mr SANDERS — Andrew, can I just open up and start with a question to you?

The CHAIR — I congratulate you on being the first person to start off by putting a question back this way. You are starting well.

Mr ELSBURY — I am worried about this line of questioning already.

Mr SANDERS — How long have you had your learners permit?

Mr ELSBURY — I have had the learners permit now for probably about 10 weeks, off the top of my head.

Mr SANDERS — Road bike or dirt bike?

Mr ELSBURY — Road bike.

Mr SANDERS — Right. Where do you ride?

Mr ELSBURY — Next question. No, I went and did a preliminary training course — —

Mr SANDERS — Pre-learner.

Mr ELSBURY — Pre-learning course. Then I did the actual licence course.

Mr SANDERS — No. You did the learners course.

Mr ELSBURY — Or the learners course, and I will be going out with DECA on-road on Friday. So I have not actually done any riding by myself yet.

Mr SANDERS — Why not? You have your learners permit.

Mr ELSBURY — I have my learners permit, but I am getting some more learning under my belt from professionals before I start doing any riding on my own.

Mr SANDERS — Why? You have a learners permit.

Mr ELSBURY — I do not feel that the training I have received thus far was adequate to put me on the road by myself.

Mr SANDERS — Thank you. I do not think it is appropriate either. It needs to be changed.

Mr ELSBURY — Yes.

The CHAIR — Over to you. How would you change it?

Mr ELSBURY — How much was that a leading question?

Mr SANDERS — Maybe there should be some on-road training as well. I am from the country. I work here and in Sale. I have a range in Sale as well. Up until two years ago I used to go down and help Ride-Tek in Dandenong originally, and now at Sandown Raceway. We give a guy — and VicRoads says so — no more than 25 kilometres an hour on the range, so our bikes really do not get out of second gear.

We do a pre-learners for some people who have never ridden. We do a day course: it is all in-house and it is all protected and fenced off, with no cars, nothing. People get a learners permit at the end of the day, and we say, 'That is a learners permit, not a licence; it is for you to go and learn'. For those in Melbourne especially, who have had nothing to do with the country — a lot of my students here have been riding bikes from the age of 10, even less, so they have a pretty good handle on riding motorbikes — the first time they get out with their learners permit they have cars and trucks buzzing around and they think, 'Hey, this is scary; I've got no cage around me'. They do very little riding, and then they come back because they have got only 15 months to get their licence. In a lot of cases we find that they have hardly ridden at all, and they expect to pass the licence course.

Maybe you should have got your licence before you did all this and I would have asked you about the licence testing, because I do not think much of that, either.

Mr ELSBURY — That is what I am going to be challenged to do in the next few months.

Mr SANDERS — When are you going to do your licence? You have got 15 months.

Mr ELSBURY — Yes, I have 15 months, and I am thinking maybe June, July next year. I will get a bit more experience.

Mr SANDERS — You will need a lot of experience. The other thing that I do not agree with at the moment is that we are allowed to do tests only. Sure, a lot of the guys up here do not have a problem with the riding test only. Because a lot of the students up here say — and I do not know how you are going to decipher what they are going to do — 'I only want my licence because I've got to have it to ride in the bush these days'. They say, 'I'll never ride on the road', but you never know.

Mr ELSBURY — Once you have the licence.

Mr SANDERS — Yes.

Mr ELSBURY — Once you have the licence you can ride anywhere; it does not matter, it does not differentiate.

Mr SANDERS — That is right, yes. But they are not interested in road rules or what we teach on the way you approach traffic or anything like that. They are not interested in that, they just want a licence — 'I've just got to have my licence because it costs too much when I get caught'. Maybe there should be compulsory courses, and also for those guys who just want to ride off-road, maybe they need to go somewhere and do a specialist course in dirt bike riding. I think people like BMW do off-road training on how to handle your bike in the bush, that sort of thing. But I am not really happy, especially that with the licence they say you have to be up to a certain standard to do the licence. I just say to them, 'The more riding you do, the easier it will become'. I get people who I know are going to be really safe out there on the road — and I am talking about people, girls or guys, who are in their middle age — but they have to go through the MLST system, which I do not agree with. That is what we have got to train them with and to test them by. There has to be a better way.

The CHAIR — Are there other comments you would like to make? Do you want to ask Mr Tilley any questions? He has done a bit of riding.

Mr ELSBURY — Yes, share it around a bit; that would be good.

Mr SANDERS — Bill, do you still ride on the road?

Mr TILLEY — Not at the moment, no. I have sold, and I have not ridden personally for over 12 months, unfortunately.

Mr SANDERS — Only 12 months. So what do we do with the people who had a bike when they were young, got married, had half a dozen kids and a mortgage and all that, and their kids have all gone and they say, ‘Now we’re going to get back into riding’?

Mr TILLEY — You are absolutely right. Certainly we have heard evidence that returning riders is an issue before us. In my former career I was involved with road safety and investigating crashes and witnessing return riders unfortunately, yes. I will return it back to you, Ian: in your experience as a trainer are there some people who do not necessarily have the ability or the capacity to be given the opportunity to ride? Are there simply some people who just should not ride in the state?

Mr SANDERS — Yes.

Mr TILLEY — Or have you had students in the past who you have had difficulty passing off?

Mr SANDERS — One of the biggest problems with them is that you see them all day and they do everything perfectly. You say, ‘Right, now I’m going to test you’. They go outside the lines, they put their foot down, they stall it. Yet I have had students who do not stall it all day. As soon I say it is test time the first thing they do is stall it. Do you know the metre square box that you have stop with your front wheels on it — they stall it, yet all day they can ride around it perfectly. You cannot say that they are not going to be able to ride on the road. Just recently I have had students here as old as 70. They had been riding bikes for years and then decided maybe they had better get a licence!

Mr TILLEY — They have been riding unlicensed for a number of years.

Mr SANDERS — Yes. Some of them are farmers. They have their farm bike, and they ride around the farm and they retire and get off the farm and say, ‘What do I do? Maybe I’ll go for a ride. I had better get a licence’. I get the odd one coming back and says, ‘Can I have some extra training?’. DECA — or was it HART? — is trialling a program at the moment where they take three or four people out and go for a ride. Some of my students have been asked to go to that, but it is all done in Melbourne. They say, ‘Hang on; I’ve just got my learners permit. I am really happy to go out and get some more experience, but I cannot travel to Cranbourne; I have never been in traffic on a motorbike before’. It is all happening around Melbourne, but we do not get the opportunity here. My mate in Wangaratta has the same problem. We were not involved with that training.

Mr TILLEY — I noted from what Sergeant Rod Lay from Victoria Police said — it was one of those moments — it is just about the change of terminology from the word ‘training’. Do you find people are turned off by the word ‘training’ and maybe you could do some wordsmithing and use the word ‘coaching’ when it comes to motorcycling or returned riders? I am just going back into the field that were discussing earlier. Could it be as simple as using the word ‘coaching’ where someone can look at your roadcraft, not unlike some golf practices? Golfers return back to the pros to get some coaching.

Mr SANDERS — It might be a better way of wording it, yes, ‘coaching’.

Mr TILLEY — In your field, as part of the Road-Tek academy, you always use the word ‘training’ rather than ‘coaching’, do you?

Mr SANDERS — Yes. I have never thought of it that way.

Mr TILLEY — It was just one of those moments from this morning; I actually picked up on it then. Maybe that could address some of those issues in relation to returned riders.

Mr SANDERS — Yes, definitely.

Mr LANGUILLER — Thanks for your contribution. What responsibility do providers have to not pass people who do not have adequate skills or knowledge? What do you think should happen? We hear some providers may pass them when in fact they should not. What is your view on this?

Mr SANDERS — To be quite honest with you, I get very few failures. With the learners it is a pretty simple, silly mistake they have made because they are nervous.

Mr LANGUILLER — Have you come across riders who in your judgement should not get the learners permit and you do not provide it to them?

Mr SANDERS — Yes and no. They come back for extra training or they will come and do another day with me.

Mr LANGUILLER — So eventually they get it.

Mr SANDERS — Yes, eventually they get it.

Mr TILLEY — But if they pass the test, you cannot refuse them.

Mr SANDERS — No, and there is another problem. I know of one particular incident, and even his mate said this — and he has passed on now; he was a young bloke, and in fact his parents even locked up his bike, but he broke in and took it anyway, and he is not here any longer — he passed that test, but you know full well that he has not got it up here to be out there on the roads. What do you do about that? The VicRoads requirement is that if they pass that test and the 32 questions — and they had to get seven wrong — they can go out and ride.

Mr TILLEY — Is the current test adequate?

Mr SANDERS — No.

Mr TILLEY — What do you think the test should incorporate?

Mr SANDERS — I knew you would ask that. What about some on-road training? They come up to a corner and they are wobbly, and we say, 'We need to fix that' or we say, 'He just went through a stop sign' or, 'He took that corner a bit wide'. I said to somebody I have known for a long time, only through business, 'We'll go for a ride to Sale'. I took her the back way. I went in front for a while, and I waved her through. I said, 'Righto, you go for a while'. Up near Hollands Landing is a fairly slow corner. There is 70-kilometre sign there. There are double lines. We are coming up to that corner and she is in front, and I am thinking I do not see a brake light: we are going pretty hard and I do not see a brake light. The next thing she went straight across the double lines. She just lost attention for a minute. She took no notice of that 70-kilometre sign. I can go around that corner a lot more quickly than 70 and stay on the right side of the road. She pulled over, and I will not repeat what she said, but it gave her a good fright and a good lesson too. I do not know how you can educate them. I talk about protective clothing and all of that sort of stuff. Maybe protective clothing needs to be compulsory.

Mr TILLEY — That is a maybe, is it? In your view, do you think it should be mandated?

Mr SANDERS — It should be, yes. I am 61. I have seen some awful accidents — mates too. It is not a pretty sight, and that is just because they have a T-shirt on or a pair of shorts. It should be mandatory, yes. It should be compulsory. Maybe we could use scooters. They can get their learners permit on a scooter, which has no gears. Maybe you need to bring in a law which says that if you are going to do it on an automatic, that is all you are allowed to ride.

Mr TILLEY — In your training experience, have you had any involvement with or seen simulators?

Mr SANDERS — No.

Mr TILLEY — When you are training students in relation to protective clothing, what do you make your students wear?

Mr SANDERS — All they have to wear is long pants, long sleeves and reasonable footwear. I say them it is preferable that they do not wear steel-cap boots. We supply them with a helmet and a pair of gloves. That is all we require: long sleeves and long pants. For example, a guy a couple of weeks ago came down and said, ‘Yes, I can ride’. He did a licence test only and crashed one of my bikes. He had one of those fleecy shirts on, and it took all the skin off his elbow. All that is required is long sleeves and long pants.

Mr TILLEY — As the current legislation requires.

Mr ELSBURY — In relation to your experience with VicRoads and the audits it does on training providers, do you think they work, and is there anything wrong with the way it does the audits?

Mr SANDERS — I just had an audit yesterday.

Mr ELSBURY — It is fresh experience then.

Mr SANDERS — The guys who come out and do the audits are quite reasonable. All they are looking for is to make sure that we are doing the training the way it should be done. I have no complaints. Some of the stuff is a little bit silly — my lines up here are a little bit rusty; they need painting.

Mr ELSBURY — How regularly would you have your trainers undertake some form of retraining themselves? How often would they get development?

Mr SANDERS — No, they do not do any re-training.

Mr ELSBURY — They do not do any retraining. Okay.

Mr SANDERS — When you say ‘training’ — what sort of training are they going to do?

Mr ELSBURY — Perhaps having one of their peers watching them go through the course or get them on the bike and say, ‘You might want to knock that rough edge off’ or, ‘Have you thought about this?’.

Mr SANDERS — It is a little bit different for me because I do not go to Melbourne anymore. Ride-Tek in Melbourne is quite big, and we did that sort of thing every 12 months or something like that. One of us would look at the other and have a go. I am a sole operator; I do it all myself here. One of the problems is that there is not enough work for anybody else or another instructor. In Melbourne they will do two courses a day, for argument’s sake — two learner courses or a licensed learner course in one day. Here sometimes my students are a little bit spoilt; there are only two of them on the course. For a big company they are not going to bother coming up to Bairnsdale. I am a sole operator here at the moment. I still keep in touch with a lot of the other guys in Melbourne, but as far as me doing training, no. VicRoads comes out and does an audit on me and watches me do a course now and again. That is about it.

Mr ELSBURY — Thank you.

Mr TILLEY — Just in the spirit of Christmas and Santa Claus and ho, ho, ho and all that, if we go in with a bit of a wish list in relation to motorcycle safety, are you able to give us some things that you would like to see happen, given your interest in the training regime, to make motorcycling safe in the state of Victoria?

Mr SANDERS — I think we should do some on-road training, certainly in Melbourne. We are supposed to be having a meeting with VicRoads over this new — —

Ms JENKINS — Graduated licensing.

Mr SANDERS — Thank you; graduated licensing. We are supposed to be having another meeting with them, and I hope we do because we want to have some input as well. We do not want VicRoads just to come up with something. Have you seen that log book? Certainly have some on-road training but not to that sort of extent. If they make it too expensive, you will find people will say they will ride without a licence. And if you have a look at the reports, you will see they are doing it now. I went to one of those meetings about graduated licensing, and one of the girls who was sitting at my table and had done her learners course with me, by the way, said — and I do not agree with the \$50 — what do you call it?

Mr TILLEY — Safety levy.

Mr SANDERS — I do not agree with the safety levy because I read somewhere of a leaked report that they would use some of the money to buy police motorcycles. That is not what it is for. If you have three motorcycles registered, you can only ride one at a time; why should I pay another \$150 — \$50 for each bike that is registered?

I also saw an article in one of the motorcycle magazines about the air force in Queensland. They had training on the air base for their motorcycle rides — sorry, not training; we will call it coaching! What they were saying was that if they had these guys come out and give them training in braking, cornering and that sort of stuff, they are saying if we have less accidents on the road, that will mean we will have less down time. What this woman said was that if we had cheaper training — coaching — maybe there would be less people in hospital and we could cut back on the cost of rehabilitation. It all comes down to a cost. One of the other people — I am not going to say who it was, but it was a policeman — said at this meeting they should do more training. It is all right for him; he has been trained by we taxpayers. If you ask people to do extra and it is going to cost them \$200 or whatever, they will say, 'If I don't need to do it, I will not do it'. It all comes down to an expense. It is a bit hard; we need to sit down with VicRoads and see if we can make it better. Certainly what we do is really not much at all.

The CHAIR — Ian, we may just run you through a few questions. What sort of bike do you ride?

Mr SANDERS — A Harley-Davidson.

The CHAIR — How many cc?

Mr SANDERS — 1340cc, 80 cubic inch, and 1840cc.

The CHAIR — You mentioned before that you had seen some awful accidents and that you are 61. In retrospect, what may have averted those accidents from taking place?

Mr SANDERS — Some of them were through alcohol; some of the kids had been drinking. How you overcome that I do not know. One other thing — while I think of it — we have a restricted period of 12 months from the time you get your licence. After that 12 months you can buy yourself a CBR 1000 or a Hyabusa R1 or whatever. They are very tricky, mate. Mine is 1340; I am talking about a bike that is a 1000cc and goes a lot harder than mine, and they are very twitchy. Maybe after 12 months you could go buy one of these. I have guys saying, 'I'm not going to ride now until I can buy my R1'. If you have ever ridden anything like that — man, do they go! They are crazy. Maybe if you want to buy a high-performance bike, there needs to be extra training. These things are good for 300 kilometres an hour — over 100 kilometres an hour in first gear — and they can get it on the back wheel in every gear. They have awesome power. Maybe there needs to be a special school for that sort of thing.

The CHAIR — Just going back again to the awful accidents that you have seen, some involving alcohol, were there any other causes of the accidents? Were there potholes in roads? Was it on a bend? Was it caused by excessive speed?

Mr SANDERS — Excessive speed, yes, I have seen that. When I was 18 quite a few of us used to ride motorbikes because you could get your motorbike learners at 17 and 9 months. Mind you, as a kid there was no such thing as a Japanese bike here, and there were no dirt bikes. What we rode in the paddocks — 'Joe Blow down the road has an old AJ in the shed; let's see what he wants for it'. We were riding those old heavy British things around in the paddocks. That is where we learned to ride. The machines that we had back then did not go all that hard, but they did not stop all that well either. I guess most of it is speed that you see. Guys go to Tassie. I have been to Tassie. I have seen guys come off. I am a lone rider; I do not ride in a group. If I want to go for a trip, I throw the wife on the back and we just go cruising around these days. I am not into the high-performance stuff, sorry. Most of it is probably people thinking they are Mick Doohan on the roads instead of doing it at the racetrack. How you stop that, I have no idea.

The CHAIR — Ian, if you do have any ideas, feel free to keep in touch with our committee. You will get a copy of the Hansard transcript. Is there anything else you would like to present to us in relation to motorbikes, motorcycle safety or road design?

Mr SANDERS — I am a bit involved with Daryl with the road wires down here. We just saw some photos of what they have done up on one of the mountain roads. That is a good thing. I am not a great believer in this wire rope stuff, but I know it is all a cost thing. I try to read a lot of motorcycle magazines and you see articles in there of what has happened to people and all of that sort of stuff. Our roads, yeah, this road from here to Hotham is not a nice ride anymore. It is undulating and broken. You come around the corner and, 'Oh, that is not good'. To give you an example, if I ride from here to Sale, I stick in the right-hand lane, even when there is a passing lane, and even if there is no other traffic around. I do not like the left-hand lane, especially in those passing lanes, because it is all broken and rough.

Mr TILLEY — So you risk copping it to get into a zone over 80 kilometres an hour?

Mr SANDERS — Sorry?

Mr TILLEY — If your speed zone is higher than 80 kilometres an hour and you are not in the left-hand lane, you are prepared to take the risk and get an infringement?

Mr SANDERS — Yes.

Mr TILLEY — That is based on infrastructure?

Mr SANDERS — Yes.

Mr TILLEY — Could we briefly talk about ABS?

Mr SANDERS — ABS?

Mr TILLEY — On motorcycles.

Mr SANDERS — I would not know. I have never ridden one with ABS.

Mr TILLEY — Okay.

Mr SANDERS — Are you saying should it be compulsory?

Mr TILLEY — It is probably fair to say that if you have not used it, or have not had anything to do with it — but if you do have a view about the good, the bad and the ugly of it, or if you have any anecdotal stories or — —

Mr SANDERS — Have you ridden a bike with ABS?

Mr TILLEY — Yes, I have.

Mr SANDERS — What is it like?

Mr TILLEY — Expressing my own view on ABS? There is the good, the bad and the ugly of it in certain circumstances, absolutely.

Mr SANDERS — Okay. From what I have heard and read about it, there was a particular model Triumph that had ABS that you could not disconnect. They reckon, and this is only talking to friends of mine who have got it, that it is no good on gravel. So if you cannot disconnect it — does it work? I do not know. What is it like in the wet?

Mr TILLEY — I have found that in a straight line it is very good in the wet when you are on full lock.

Mr SANDERS — Right, and what about going around a bend? You should not be using your front brake anyway.

Mr TILLEY — In certain circumstances it might be — —

Mr SANDERS — If you are asking me whether it should be compulsory on motorcycles, no. Simple. Linked brakes — some bikes have linked brakes. Why don't we teach people how to ride? They say, 'Don't buy a car unless it's got ...' What do they call it? Braking — —

Mr ELSBURY — ESC?

Mr TILLEY — Electronic stability control.

Mr SANDERS — Yes. Well, that is fine. We put all of these things in the car, and that is terrific. Why don't we teach the nut behind the wheel how to drive properly to start with?

The CHAIR — On that very point, if you were designing a road-driving course, what would you put in a road licence test that might give greater awareness for motorcyclists on the road?

Mr SANDERS — Sorry?

The CHAIR — In teaching drivers — motorists, not motorcycle riders — what would you teach them to improve safety outcomes for motorcyclists on the road?

Mr SANDERS — I have really never thought about it. With students on motorcycles, I am always at them. They ride around and they are looking at the road down there, and I say, 'What are you looking down there for? What is going on up there?'. From what I have seen of people getting a car licence, they go up to VicRoads with the learner driver and they take them around the circuit. This is where you will go. I do not think they teach much about looking up and being aware. What about a head check? How many people in motor cars do head checks?

Mr TILLEY — I do. Every time. That has been punched into me.

Mr ELSBURY — Me too.

The CHAIR — Mr Sanders, if Mr Elsbury was your student at Ride-Tek, what would be the one lesson that you would send him out onto the open road with as he was just finishing your course? What is the one thing that you try to drive home to your students that they will never forget? If in fact there is one thing in your teaching material that you try to emphasise?

Mr SANDERS — Be aware of what is around you. My riding is country riding compared to the city. You have still got to be aware of the kangaroos you could hit on the side of the road. That little wallaby — you do not know which way he is going to hop, so just be aware — eyes up, scanning, look around. Unfamiliar road — slow down. If you are not sure what is around the corner, you should not be going that hard. We teach emergency braking and what we do, and I know you have got to look after your students — I do not want them falling off and breaking their necks or smashing up my bikes or whatever. We show them the basics of how to brake in a straight line. When we are doing the licence course, I get them back and I say, 'Right, now we are going to do a bit of emergency braking. How do we get a motorcycle to stop in a hurry?'. They say, 'Er'. I say, 'All right, what speed have you had your bike up to?'. They say, 'Only what I'm allowed to'. I say, 'No, I am not a cop. What have you actually had it up to?'. 'About 120 or 130'. 'Have you tried to do an emergency stop at that speed?'. 'Oh, no'. 'Well, why are you going that fast?'. They do not even practise it.

The CHAIR — Mr Sanders, thank you very much for giving of your time to come along today and for your expertise. Mr Elsbury knows who to come to if he needs some further tips up this way and going down the back road near Bairnsdale. Thank you very much.

Mr SANDERS — Just get plenty of riding in. Just one question before I leave you — why haven't you been out on the road?

Mr ELSBURY — Because I do not think I have the experience yet. I really do not think that the licensing course gave me enough experience to be out there and survive.

Mr SANDERS — Thank you.

Mr ELSBURY — So I am doing more courses.

Mr SANDERS — Yes, it is very scary out there, especially in the city. Especially in Melbourne. I hope that has been of some help. It certainly needs improving.

Committee adjourned.