

U.S. Transportation Secretary Lobbies for Helmet Laws

There's a big difference between promoting helmet usage and advocating helmet laws, and U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary Peters made it clear to Congress that she prefers the latter as her cornerstone to motorcycle safety.

In testimony before the U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee Transportation Subcommittee on March 6, Secretary Peters revealed her desire to promulgate nationwide helmet laws; "I support giving the information to states so that they can act on those laws," she told Senators, adding "And I certainly have made myself available to a number of states, and, in fact, have called governors when I see substantial increases in the number of motorcycle deaths in a state, especially a state that has repealed a helmet law."

Calling upon the federal government to ease lobbying restrictions imposed at the behest of motorcycle rights organizations across the country, Peters has requested legislation that will allow her to divert motorcycle safety funding to convince states to enact mandatory helmet laws.

Peters has sent letters to House and Senate leadership urging legislation to allow states to utilize federal funds intended for motorcycle rider training and awareness programs to promote helmet laws instead. www.ON-A-BIKE.com

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Honda to cease U.S. Motorcycle production in Ohio

After nearly 30 years, Honda Motor Co. plans to stop producing motorcycles in the United States next year, ending production at its first U.S. plant and consolidating the Marysville Motorcycle Plant production at a new state-of-the-art manufacturing facility in Kumamoto, Japan which will be capable of producing 600,000 motorcycles a year.

"This move allows us to improve the competitiveness and appeal of our products by applying the latest technologies and production systems at one efficient location," Akio Hamada, president & CEO of Honda of America, said in a statement. "Obviously, the motorcycle plant has a lot of historical significance," he said. "It was Honda's first plant in North America. It started producing motorcycles on Nov. 10, 1979. So obviously, there's a lot of emotion involved in this kind of decision. The sprawling plant, in Marysville, Ohio, employs 450 workers. Honda said there will be no layoffs when production ends in spring 2009. "There were a lot of people who felt disappointment," said plant manager Jan Gansheimer, noting that many of the employees are motorcycle enthusiasts who have spent much of their careers at the plant.

Mirroring the rest of the industry, Honda's U.S. motorcycle sales fell in 2007, but the company said that its decision to end Ohio motorcycle production was not based on a softening American motorcycle market.

Honda's manufacturing venture in America began at the Marysville plant in September, 1979, where its first product was a motocross machine. Over time, a \$165 million capital investment was made in the facility, which became the worldwide supplier of some of Honda's most popular models, such as the luxury touring Gold Wing. The motorcycle plant reached its peak production in 1997 when it turned out 174,000 vehicles, including all-terrain vehicles. In 2005, ATV production was moved to South Carolina. Last year, the Ohio factory built nearly 61,000 motorcycles, 44,000 of which were Gold Wings and VTX cruiser motorcycles. www.ON-A-BIKE.com

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