

News For Thought



Ride Smart- Motorcycles Improve Brain Function

Riding motorcycles helps keep drivers young by invigorating their brains, the scientist behind popular "Brain Training" computer software said recently, citing a new scientific study. "The driver's brain gets activated by riding motorbikes" in part because it requires heightened alertness, Japanese neuroscientist Ryuta Kawashima said after his research team and Yamaha Motor conducted a string of experiments involving middle-aged men.

"In a convenient and easy environment, the human mind and body get used to setting the hurdle low," he warned. "Our final conclusion is that riding motorcycles can lead to smart ageing."

Kawashima is the designer of "Brain Training" software, which incorporates quizzes and other games and is available on the Nintendo DS game console under the name "Brain Age".

A self-professed motorcycle fan, 49-year-old Kawashima cited a new study conducted jointly by Yamaha and Tohoku University, for which he works.

One experiment involved 22 men in their 40s and 50s who held motorcycle licenses but had not operated a cycle for at least a decade. They were randomly split into two groups, with one asked to resume riding motorcycles in everyday life for two months, and another that kept using bicycles or cars. Kawashima says research showed the motorcycle-riding team demonstrated improvements in memory, space recognition and other functions of the prefrontal area. The area covers memory, information processing and concentration functions.

"The group that rode motorbikes posted higher marks in cognitive function tests," Kawashima said.

In a test requiring the men to remember a set of numbers in reverse order, the riders' scores jumped by more than 50 percent in two months, while the non-riders' marks deteriorated slightly, he said.

The riders also said they made fewer mistakes at work and felt happier. "Mental care is a very big issue in modern society," said Kawashima. "I think we made an interesting stir here as data showed you can improve your mental condition simply by using motorbikes to commute."

In 2003, Kawashima authored "Train Your Brain: 60 Days to a Better Brain". More recently, he teamed with Toyota to help develop intelligent cars designed to help seniors drive safely. www.ON-A-BIKE.com

Dealers from every corner of the country and other concerned individuals have flooded the CPSC and Congress with calls, e-mails and more than 100,000 letters complaining about the new law and urging support for exclusions from the act for powersports vehicles, parts and accessories.

They claim in part that the lead present in their products pose no health risk to children because the only interaction would be by hand, not mouth, and that a toxicologist study reveals that exposure is substantially less than the intake of lead from food and water. www.ON-A-BIKE.com

Congressional Committee Approves Bill to Protect Health Insurance for Riders

On March 4, by voice vote, the House Energy and Commerce Committee passed bipartisan legislation to strengthen health insurance coverage for injuries incurred while participating in legal recreational and transportation activities, such as motorcycling, riding ATVs, snowmobiling and horseback riding.

"This bill requires health insurance companies to be up front and honest with their policy holders when limitations or restrictions are placed on benefits," said Rep. Bart Stupak (D-MI) who introduced the measure with Rep. Michael Burgess (R-TX). "Many Americans are unaware that their health insurance may not cover injuries resulting from certain recreational activities because their policy is unclear or overly broad."

H.R. 1253, the "Health Insurance Restrictions and Limitations Clarification Act of 2009", would establish new disclosure rules requiring health insurance plans to provide a description of limitations and exclusions in their policies. Specifically, the bill requires that coverage exclusions must be "explicit and clear" and that they must be disclosed to plan sponsors in advance of the point of sale. The bill further requires that plan sponsors and insurers must disclose such coverage exclusions to enrollees "in a form that is easily understandable" both before enrollment and upon their enrollment at the earliest opportunity that other materials are provided.

In January 2001, a rule was issued that created an inadvertent loophole in the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).

Because of the way the rule was written, it has allowed insurers to deny health benefits for a covered injury resulting from participation in recreational activities such as skiing, horseback riding, ATV riding, snowmobiling and motorcycling.

In many situations the exclusions are unclear or overly broad, creating confusion for individuals who may ride motorcycles, horses, snowmobiles, ATVs or participate in other legal activities that could result in an injury.

"Passing this straight forward legislation would protect those across the country who ride motorcycles, horses, snowmobiles, ATVs or participate in other recreational activities from being caught by surprise," Stupak said.

Stupak is a senior member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, which has jurisdiction over health policy. H.R. 1253 awaits consideration by the full House of Representatives, which previously approved the legislation in September 2008, but the bill was not considered by the Senate in the 110th Congress. www.ON-A-BIKE.com

Kiddie Bike Ban Could Cost Billions

The new lead-content rules that have banned the sales of many youth motorcycles and all-terrain vehicles could cost the industry over \$1 billion in lost economic value this year, predicts the Motorcycle Industry Council. Last year, more than 100,000 of the youth-oriented vehicles were sold. Today, more than 13,000 dealers nationwide are stuck holding onto millions of dollars in inventory as the off-road industry now finds itself crippled and rather confused in the destructive wake of the CPSIA in an already harsh economy. Motorcycle dealers across the country are fuming, saying the ban couldn't have come at a worse time, making sluggish sales in a tough economy even tougher. Powersports manufacturers are advising their dealers to pull the banned models off the sales floor or risk heavy fines under the

Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act of 2008, which went into force February 10th.

Intentionally or otherwise, the CPSIA has effectively banned the production, importing and sale of kids' motorcycles and ATVs because certain parts of the vehicles unavoidably contain more lead than is deemed allowable on children's products - for instance, on the battery terminals, brake components and valve stems - and the CPSC has interpreted this to mean that OHVs (off-highway vehicles) present a lead-poisoning threat to children 12 and under. Not only can they not sell the new vehicles, but they're not even allowed to sell parts for them!

Utah May Reward Helmet Wearers

In a unique and interesting twist to mandatory helmet laws, the state of Utah is considering a bill that would reward riders who break the law while wearing a helmet.

The House Transportation Committee unanimously approved a proposal from Rep. Ronda Rudd Menlove (R-Garland) that would knock \$10 off of the fine for motorcyclists cited for traffic violations if they are wearing a helmet at the time.

"Instead of just punishment, why not give an incentive for people to use a helmet?," Menlove told the Standard-Examiner newspaper.