

News For Thought



Ten Percent of Drivers Unfit

As you're riding along through traffic be sure to look out for every tenth car. According to new research that suggests one in ten drivers may be unfit to drive. Study results released by GMAC Insurance indicate that up to 20 million licensed drivers may lack basic driving knowledge and would fail a standard state drivers test. In an effort to gauge American drivers' road knowledge, GMAC studied nearly 5,000 licensed drivers nationwide aged 16-65 by administering a 20-question written test similar to those used to award state drivers licenses or permits. The results of the GMAC Insurance National Drivers Test were alarming, and unveiled pervasive dangerous behavior amongst our nation's drivers. Study results indicate that many U.S. road users are perplexed by such standard driving practices as merging, failure to yield when making left turns, and road-sign interpretation. In addition, twenty-nine percent (57 million) of drivers who drink admitted they would knowingly drive while over the legal limit "if they felt okay." Such lack of knowledge and unsafe driving practices are identified as common causes of accidents. Aimncom.com

Tennesseans Celebrate Banner Year

Tennessee started out its 2005 legislative session with a brand new lobbying team and a brand new Legislative Chairman. No files, no experience, no expertise. "From day one, we knew we were going to be working at least 8 different bills," said John R. Pierce, CMT/ABATE State Legislative Chairman, adding "Talk about learning to swim by being thrown into the deep end of the pool!"

But with help from "the most motorcycle friendly legislature on the planet" the Legislative Team succeeded in passing 7 of the 8 bills they got introduced in the first half of their two-year session, including: a proclamation declaring May as Motorcycle Safety and Awareness Month; a repeal of their handlebar height law; a good ROW (Right of Way) bill that will be the basis for more stringent legislation to follow; a parade bill that says riders can go lidless in a parade if they stay under 30 miles per hour, making it legal to have a self-declared parade along the entire 635-mile length of Tennessee as long as they stay in small towns; a bicycle helmet bill that makes it legal for a motorcyclist in Tennessee to wear a certain type of bicycle or ventilated helmet; and last but certainly not least, they are now allowed to purchase a variety of military license plates that were previously only available for cars.

The frosting on the cake came when the Department of Safety gave CMT/ABATE a \$15,000 grant to implement Motorcycle Safety and Awareness Month, which has resulted in getting 50 billboards in cities across the state with motorcycle awareness messages, along with signs on city busses and 8,000 bumper stickers. "The full helmet choice bill is taking a little longer," says Pierce, but progress has been made and inroads have been laid, and "With all that's happened in the last 5 months, I think we can make the case that Tennessee is a very motorcycle friendly state. By this time next year, we will also be a free state." Aimncom.com

Taiwanese Woman Fails Motorcycle Test for the 51st Time

59-year-old woman in Tainan City, Lee Hsu Shui-mian, has been taking the exam to get a license to drive a motorcycle for the past 20 years, but as yet has still failed to snag the valued piece of paper. Lee Hsu has taken the test 50 times, but still has not passed the oral portion of the exam. Her husband passed away when she was 33 years old, and since then Lee Hsu has cut hair for a living in an effort to support her three children. When she was 39, she made her first trip to the Tainan Department of Motor Vehicles to seek a license to drive a motorcycle. Lee Hsu said she required the license since she needed to drive her children to school, and for work related purposes. However, given that Lee Hsu is illiterate, each time she has taken the test, she's failed.

As Lee Hsu is getting on in age, her memory is starting to fail her. In addition, her hearing ability has diminished. Her daughter has suggested to her mother that she give up taking the motorcycle license exam and instead switch to a four-wheel electric vehicle, but Lee Hsu said the electric vehicles are simply too slow. As a result, she refused to take her daughter's suggestion and signed up to take the test for the 51st time. She passed the driving test without any problem, but she once again did not score a passing grade on the oral test. Undeterred, Lee Hsu said she intends to try again next time. Aimncom.com

COBDEN, MN.

IRON HORSE
Schoen

507-794-5050

430 Center St
Cobden, MN 56085

7 miles west of Sleepy Eye, MN
on MN Hwy 14

Virginia Enacts Motorcycle-Friendly Signage

After a long and arduous process of proposed legislation, engineers meetings, and field testing, Virginia now has standards in place backed by law that require the marking of steel plates when used in temporary road repairs. The steel plates, commonly referred to as bridging, pose particular hazards for motorcycles because of their unusually smooth finish that can become slippery in humid conditions or when other traffic deposits grease, oil and fluids on them.

A.I.M. (Aid to Injured Motorcyclists) Attorney Tom McGrath, founder of Virginia Coalition of Motorcyclists (VCOM) and VCOM director Jim Cannon spearheaded the effort with the help of Virginia Beach Delegate, John Welch. Delegate Welch introduced House Bill 2020 requiring the markings of all roadway conditions deemed hazardous to motorcycles, and with the threat of legislation hanging over their heads the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) and the private contractors became cooperative. This resulted in a series of meetings between VCOM, the highway engineers, and contractors to develop the best practice for handling these conditions. As a result of these meetings, Virginia now has signage specific to motorcycles notifying riders of potential hazards ahead. Governor Mark Warner signed HB 2020 into law, requiring that steel plates in the roadway must have a sign, if practical, as well as be marked with a reflective material on all four corners highlighting the steel plate and making it visible at night and in poor weather conditions, etc. "We think it's great that the highway engineers now recognize that motorcycles sometimes need specific consideration and look forward to working with VDOT on other issues in the future," says McGrath. Aimncom.com

Arizona Honors Veterans

In an e-mail from former State Representative Wally Straughn of Phoenix, who is a member of MMA and ABATE, he writes; "I would like to notify your readers, especially the Arizona bikers who are military veterans, that the state of Arizona is now offering Veterans' license plates for motorcycles. The legislature approved the plates during the 2004 session and the plates finally went on sale in June of 2005."

Straghn goes on the explain; "The importance of Veterans' plates on motorcycles is not only to show your pride as a military veteran. Each plate costs \$25, the same as any other Arizona plate, and \$17 of each sale goes to the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services. I authored this bill in the State Legislature in an effort to increase funding for the State Veterans Home. It is a great cause and I encourage every veteran and family member who owns a motorcycle to buy a vet plate."

And finally; "I'd also like to tell you what a pleasure it was to work with motorcyclists like Bobbi Hartman (Lobbyist for ABATE of Arizona) and Ray Houston (Chairman of the MMA and board member for the National Coalition of Motorcyclists - NCOM). They were effective speakers for the issue and brought many other motorcycle rights activists to the legislature to assure passage of the bill. It would not have happened without them."

"I recently bought my first motorcycle and I hope you will all join me in ordering the new Veterans tags that are now available." Aimncom.com

Shut up and Drive

A recent study sounds the alarm on driving while talking on cell phones, and surprisingly the study found no difference in the accident rates for drivers using hands-free phones as opposed to hand-held phones. For either type of phone, talking while driving increased four-fold the chances of an accident requiring hospitalization. Research by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety suggests that using a hands-free device instead of a hand-held phone while behind the wheel will not necessarily improve safety. The institute said it was the first attempt to estimate whether phone use increases the risk of an injury crash in automobiles.

The study, published in the British Medical Journal, and released July 12, found that male and female drivers had the same increase in risk from using a phone, along with drivers who are older and younger than age 30. A survey released earlier this year by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration found that 8 percent of drivers were using cell phones during daylight hours last year. It represented a 50 percent increase since 2002. With more motorists dialing and driving than ever, lawmakers have tried to find ways of reducing driver distraction. New York, New Jersey and the District of Columbia prohibit talking on hand-held cell phones while driving. Some cities, such as Chicago, Santa Fe, N.M., and Brookline, Mass., require hands-free devices in automobiles, and Connecticut drivers will have to start using hands-free devices beginning on October 1st. Aimncom.com