

# News For Thought



The Pasadena Fire Marshal's Office has determined that a motorcycle with a possible gasoline leak is the cause of a fire which led to the destruction of a home and a garage and damaged a neighboring home. Arson investigators discovered two motorcycles inside the garage, and the homeowner had been working on the carburetor of one of the motorcycles. A possible fuel leak may have caused the gasoline vapors to spread to the water heater that was inside the garage where the fire originated, according to The Citizen Reporter, a Texas newspaper. So if you're working on your bike, do so in a well-ventilated area. If you're storing your bike over the winter, make sure your fuel petcock is turned off! Bill Bish NCOM

New motorcycle registrations have continuously increased since 1990, which means more riders on the road, but at the same time motorcycle crashes are down. This good news is compounded by a 47% drop in injury involvement from 1990 through 1998 when it began to rise, though even in 2001 the rate was still 30% lower than in 1990. However, now for the bad news; motorcycle fatalities are way up, and have doubled in the past five years to now equal the 1990 fatality rate.

The reason for this dramatic increase goes far beyond the simple formula: more motorcycles = more fatalities. In a recent Special Report written by Wendy Moon for Motorcycle Consumer News, the author looks deep into the numbers and explains that this epidemic is more than just a function of the numbers. In 1990 there was 1 fatality in 37 crashes, but now it's 1 fatality in 22 crashes – a rise in crash-to-fatality rate of 40.5%.

While safetycrats insist that this is a result of more states easing helmet requirements, NHTSA's "Recent Trends in Motorcycle Fatalities" states that helmet use in all motorcycle fatalities has increased from 43% to 53% from 1998-2001, even though more states did not require adult helmet usage.

Speed and engine size are also not to blame for the increased motorcyclist fatality rate. Speed-related motorcycle fatalities have dropped from 41% in 1998 to 38% in 2002, and states with higher posted limits have the lowest percentage of motorcycle fatalities.

Booze-blaming also doesn't hold water, because alcohol-involved rider fatalities have fallen from 40% in 1990 to 28% in 1999.

All in all, considering the decline in crashes despite the increase in ridership demonstrates that today's motorcyclists are more educated, better trained and safer than ever before!

So, what's the answer? What has changed since 1990 to account for such a dramatic increase in motorcyclist fatalities?

According to MCN, the one thing that explains why more die while less are injured is the radical change in the traffic mix. Specifically, since 1990, the light truck vehicle (LTV) market, which includes Sport Utility Vehicles (SUVs), has increased 200 times and now represents approximately 50% of new passenger vehicle sales!

In 2002, car vs. motorcycle accidents claimed the lives of 662 motorcyclists, but that same year LTV vs. motorcycle accidents killed 645 bikers. Now, to put this in perspective, passenger cars outnumber SUVs by a margin of 3-1! Therefore, LTVs are enormously over-represented in fatal motorcycle accidents.

These LTV-related accidents are referred to as "mismatch crashes" and explains why more of those collisions are fatal. This mismatch has been well documented in terms of the danger to passenger car occupants involved in collisions with LTVs, as size, bumper height, frontal geometry, frame stiffness and mass contribute to a lethal combination. So it's not just that there are more LTVs on the road today, but that it's their

design that creates the ultimate mismatch with motorcycles.

So, the next time legislators call for a mandatory helmet law, ask 'em what they drive!

## House passes changes to helmet law

1. The Michigan House voted Wednesday to allow bikers to ride without their helmets if they meet certain requirements, but the leader of the Senate said that chamber won't take up the bill. The legislation, approved 69-37, would repeal the state's 38-year-old helmet law. Four representatives didn't vote. Supporting the bill were Bill Huizenga, R-Zeeland, and Fulton Sheen, R-Plainwell. Opposing the bill were Barb Vander Veen, R-Allendale, and William Van Regenmorter, R-Hudsonville. Bikers over 21 who've been licensed to ride a motorcycle for at least two years and finished a safety course wouldn't have to wear a helmet under the bill.

## CHICAGO DROPS HELMET PROPOSAL, BUT MAY CONFISCATE NOISY BIKES

Motorcyclists packed the Chicago City Council transportation committee meeting as city officials were preparing to consider Alderman Burke's proposal for a city-wide helmet requirement, but were informed that the proposed ordinance had been pulled. Alderman Allen, chairman of the committee, gave no explanation as to why the ordinance was pulled, but before the committee adjourned, he did commit to informing ABATE of Illinois in advance should the proposal be placed back on the agenda at a later date.

However, Alderman Natarus, who reportedly "will never like ABATE", has agreed to consider an equally bad ordinance that would allow the city to confiscate motorcycles for noise violations. ABATE is scheduled to meet with Alderman Natarus about this ordinance after the veto session. Bill Bish NCOM

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