

**Troubling Times for Motorcyclists  
More Crashes, More Injuries, More Fatalities**

Motorcycling has enjoyed a surge in popularity in recent years. Fresh air, sunshine, and a feeling of freedom lure women and men of all ages onto the roads. Unfortunately, motorcyclist fatalities and injuries have increased. According to preliminary data from the Department of Public Safety, in 2003, 55 Minnesotans died in motorcycle crashes, the largest number of rider fatalities since 1988. State traffic safety officials are alarmed. "Sadly, the dramatic rise in motorcyclist fatalities in our state reflects a national trend," says Kathy Swanson, director of the Minnesota Office of Traffic Safety. "We're trying to better educate motorcyclists and other drivers in order to turn this problem around." Who's at Fault?

Most riders believe that other drivers are the greatest threat to their safety, but more than half of the motorcycle deaths in 2003 were due to single-vehicle crashes. Speeding, inexperience, inattention, and alcohol impairment are the most common contributing factors in these crashes. This doesn't mean, however, that other drivers are not at fault, too. In 2003, almost half of fatal motorcycle crashes involved another vehicle. Many times, the other driver did not see the motorcyclist until it was too late - or not at all. Although half of the state's riders live in the Twin Cities metro area, nearly 60 percent of the deaths occurred in greater Minnesota. The narrow, scenic roads in rural areas that attract motorcyclists also force riders to deal with sharp curves, limited visibility, and deer. Riders who are ages 20 to 29 and 40 to 49 are most likely to be involved in fatal crashes. From 1998 to 2002, 86 percent of rider fatalities were men. But in 2003, 10 women-almost 20 percent-died in motorcycle crashes. Seven of these women were passengers on a motorcycle.

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**Options for Survival:**

Licensing and protective gear are critical to motorcyclists' survival. Of the riders who died in 2002, one in five did not have a proper motorcycle license. And protective equipment, such as a helmet, jacket, gloves, and boots can reduce or prevent serious injuries resulting from a crash. Rider training is also a factor in avoiding and handling dangerous situations. Proper training helps riders develop the skills and knowledge they need to be safe on all types of roads. Training courses are available statewide for new, returning, and experienced riders. For course information or safe riding tips, visit the motorcycle safety Web page at [www.motorcycle-safety.state.mn.us](http://www.motorcycle-safety.state.mn.us), or call 800-407-6677 to find training locations.

**Sales people wanted:** All regions available. If you live the biker lifestyle and would like to be part of the Free Riders Press staff, give us a call 715-344-6164 or email us at [preacher@freeriders-press.us](mailto:preacher@freeriders-press.us)

**HELMETS DOWN UNDER**

A recent court case may force Australian cowboys to wear helmets. Officials in New South Wales have charged a ranch owner over the death of a rider who fell off a horse, and safety advocates insist he should have had a helmet on. The rancher's conviction is creating controversy in the Australian Outback, and cowboy hats for the jackaroos may be heading for the history books. A ranch manager says the only time he's ever known the cowboys to wear helmets was when they were riding motorbikes, and the president of a farmer's group told the Associated Press (AP) that replacing the broad-brimmed hats with helmets could increase skin cancer and heat stroke. But others dismiss that argument, saying it's possible to come up with a hard hat that has a broad brim.

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**Tomahawk Fall Ride Bikers get a break**

With any big event, usually the only problems are alcohol related. Tomahawk Fall Ride being no different. During the Fall Ride, Tomahawk has a "no open intoxicant ordinance" from 5 pm to 12:30 am Friday and Saturday during the street dances. It has been brought to my attention that 43 fines were issued during the Harley Weekend Sept 17 & 18th. Now from what I have witnessed and heard about the police during this weekend, they have for the most part always promoted a safe and fun time. During my 12 years attending the Fall Ride, I have never seen the law throw their badges around. As long as we as bikers respect them, we have been given the same in return.

For the 43 unlucky people that received open intoxicants fines, you are getting a break. Tomahawk wants this particular weekend to be as enjoyable as it can be for the bikers that come in from all over.

In a letter from Assistant City Attorney Dave Reiff to Police Chief Don Johnson, all 43 ticketed people will have their citations dismissed. Also stating, "I have discussed this with Mayor Lee, and he agrees that this type of thing is not good public relations." According to Reiff, "The only exception I would make to dismissing these cases is if someone was offered the opportunity to pour out a drink and refused, or got smart with the officer."

The way I see it, this kind of thing is a two way street, for both law enforcement and civilian. If I'm respectful to you, give me the courtesy back.