

# News For Thought



## Increased Motorcyclist Deaths Blamed on Bad Economy

Since gas prices increased, experts say more inexperienced riders have hit the road -- literally.

Because of the fuel efficiency of motorcycles, more drivers are switching from four wheels to two, and what used to be a symbol of freedom and adventure is now also a symbol of thriftiness. "Last year, our sales were the best we ever had for 33 years," said Al Lamb, owner of Dallas Honda, pointing out that bike sales peaked last year before dipping and rising again this year.

But Dr. Fernando Wilson, a professor at the University of North Texas Health Science Center, said for every dollar increase in gas prices, 1,500 more motorcycle riders die each year nationwide.

Some say car drivers need to hang up their cell phones and pay more attention, but many bikers attribute higher crash rates to the influx of new, inexperienced riders on the road.

"If you mess up on a motorcycle, it's probably a lot more tragic than in a vehicle," motorcyclist Stephen Dutcher told TV-33 News, recommending that new riders should get trained beyond state testing requirements. "I would recommend everyone to take the Motorcycle Safety Foundation course." [www.ON-A-BIKE.com](http://www.ON-A-BIKE.com)

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## New Motorcycle Emissions Standards Taking Effect

As 2010 motorcycles hit dealer showrooms, new EPA emissions standards will be making them greener...both environmentally and economically.

Starting next year when stricter Environmental Protection Agency guidelines on motorcycle emissions come into effect for all new two- and three-wheelers built or

sold in the U.S., the EPA projects a 50% reduction in pollutants emitted at their tail pipes -- but such drastic reductions come with a bigger price tag: According to a 2003 EPA report, the average estimated cost per highway motorcycle to meet the 2010 standards is \$45, which is likely passed along to consumers. At the same time, motorcyclists are likely to save money at the

pump as the new technology brings with it better fuel efficiency.

Increased use of technologies demonstrated as effective in 4-stroke motorcycle engines, such as the catalytic converters, secondary air injection and electronic fuel inject systems, are expected to decrease harmful emissions, according to a 2003 EPA report. The report also reads, however, that the standards will not result in universal use of catalytic converters.

Catalytic converters are pollution control devices that reduce nitrogen oxides, hydrocarbons and carbon monoxide, and while not specifically required by the EPA rules, catalytic converters will have a hand in reducing emissions in the new standards.

"We already have the 2010 models coming in, and they all have the catalytic converters on them," Steve Tuchschildt Sr., owner of Mid-America Harley Davidson, told the Columbia Missourian newspaper. "That's new."

The more stringent EPA standards won't affect existing motorcycles. The emissions limits will only apply to motorcycles and scooters manufactured after the effective date. [www.ON-A-BIKE.com](http://www.ON-A-BIKE.com)

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## Motorcycle Sales are Running out of Gas

Last year, fuel-efficient motorcycles proved to be a viable option for motorists facing higher and higher gas prices, but following more than a decade of steadily increasing sales figures, the economic downturn has caught up to bike makers.

For 14 years, through 2006, U.S. motorcycle sales had increased every year. Sales started to drop in 2007 but still topped the 1 million mark.

A year ago, as gas prices pushed toward \$5 a gallon, fuel-sipping two-wheelers got a boost. Despite the worsening economy, street bike sales were down only 3.3% in 2008

and smaller scooters enjoyed their best year ever, posting a 41.5% gain, according to the Motorcycle Industry Council.

Now, little seems to be working for motorcycle manufacturers as sales have plunged 38% in the third quarter from the same period a year ago (falling from 218,242 last year to 136,876), with the biggest drops coming in two of the industry's biggest product lines: cruisers and sport bikes. Scooter sales are also down 62% through the first three quarters of 2009.

The only bright spot was that sales are dropping at a slower pace: The number of bikes sold in the second quarter fell 53.5 percent from the same period a year earlier. Historically, the second and third quarters are strong for the industry because the weather generally is warm and buyers are gearing up to ride, according to an article appearing in the Chicago Tribune.

Despite a federal stimulus that allows bike buyers to write off the sales tax, sagging sales have prompted bike builders to begin cutting staff and other expenses.

Last week, publicly held Harley-Davidson Inc. reported an 84% drop in quarterly earnings to \$26.5 million. The company said it was getting out of the sport-bike business, shutting down the longtime Buell line and selling its MV Augusta operation, a high-end Italian brand it bought last year.

Already this year, the Milwaukee manufacturer joined the likes of Honda, Kawasaki, Yamaha, Suzuki and Victory in laying off employees, reducing production and dropping prices to help dealers shrink swollen inventories.

Mark Blackwell, vice president of Victory Motorcycles, which suffered a 56% decline in the July-September period, told the Los Angeles Times "We haven't laid everybody off. We haven't totally stopped advertising. We've kept up the product development because we're positioning this business for when the market stabilizes and grows." Harley-Davidson and Victory, a division of Polaris in Minnesota, hope to stem U.S. losses, in part, by growing overseas sales. Harley is pursuing emerging markets such as India and China; Victory is going after Europe.

But with the riding season over for much of the country, summer 2010 can't come fast enough for the industry. [www.ON-A-BIKE.com](http://www.ON-A-BIKE.com)

## NYC Mayor Contributes to Global Road Safety

New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg is donating \$125 million to road safety programs in middle and low income countries.

Bloomberg gave \$9 million in 2007 to a pilot program on road safety in Vietnam and Mexico, and his latest gift expands the effort to a 5-year program in eight other countries that have high numbers of traffic injuries and fatalities.

His philanthropic foundation announced that the donation will help efforts to reduce speeding and drunken driving, and increase the use of motorcycle helmets, child seats and seatbelts. [www.ON-A-BIKE.com](http://www.ON-A-BIKE.com)

## Quotable Quote:

"For years governments have been promising more than they can deliver, and delivering more than they can afford."

Paul Martin (1938 - ?), 21st Prime Minister of Canada

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