

**It's all about freedom**

By Dave "Chubby" Charlebois

It seems way too early in the year to do much more than dream about hitting the road with the wind in my face. In Southeast Wisconsin where I live there was still riding weather past Christmas and like a good biker I took full advantage of it. Now, you'd think I could just enjoy the rest of the winter doing some long overdue maintenance on the scooter, but no, the government and its safety nazi's have to mess it all up for me. Most state legislatures went into session in the beginning of January and it didn't take long for them to talk about introducing mandatory helmet laws. Now, don't let this rile you up already. So far the Midwest has been immune to this drivel. Michigan not included. But Montana, Arkansas, Pennsylvania, and Salt Lake City, Utah have all introduced such bills. And, with the evil safety nazi Frank Lautenberg from New Jersey sitting on the Senate transportation committee I wouldn't be surprised if mandatory helmets were brought up at the federal level. I often say that ABATE is not just about helmet laws, and if you look on our website you can find proof of this. But, mandatory helmet laws have always been the glue that binds us and I hope we have enough support and membership if we have to go down that road again. I haven't been around long enough to remember the helmet rallies of '77, or the yearly battles we had to endure until the late '80s trying to keep the lids off our heads. I don't know many of the early organizers of ABATE of Wisconsin Inc, but I have met a few. I've read and heard many accounts of what motorcycling was like before we were around, and I still applaud the many accomplishments of those that came before me. Many things have changed since ABATE began, and we've all had to work hard to keep up with the pace of an ever changing society. I think ABATE can be proud of where we are today, I'm sure its founders never would have believed we would be around 32 years later. If we were just fighting to keep the lids off, things might be different today. But the fact that laws are constantly being introduced taking away our rights to make our own decisions in the name of safety, the environment, and everlasting peace and quiet, shows that there will always be a need for us to remain vigilant well into the future. As much as ABATE of Wisconsin Inc needs to grow, we also need to remember what we have always been fighting for, FREEDOM.

It seems that the word "freedom" gets used quite a bit these days, and I can't say I agree with the way everyone uses their definition of "freedom". But, as a biker, I can respect everyone's right to use their freedoms as they choose. I didn't have the honor of serving my country in the armed forces as many of our members have, but it doesn't mean I don't appreciate what many have died for and so many others have worked so hard to achieve. It's hard for me to think of a flag being burned or hanged upside down in protest, even if it is our right to do so. It's also hard to see people speak poorly about a government that has given them so much, but it is our right to do so. God is taken out of our schools, but they still get paid vacation for Christmas, Easter, and Good Friday. But, it's their right to do so. They make a foreign language version of the national anthem for the latest ethnic group that feels they don't have to learn the language that every immigrant that built America speaks. But, it's their right to do so. All of this is done in the name of "freedom". After all, it is a free country. Or is it? Many

people give up more and more of their freedoms every year, some willingly, some kicking and screaming. I tend to be the latter. Some of the things that we have given up in the last decade even though we are responsible adults make me wonder where or when it will end. I have to wear a seatbelt even though I'd rather take my chances being thrown from my car than be trapped in flaming wreckage when I crash. If I ever do. I'd like to be able to smoke in a bar after work, where no healthy person should dare to be anyway. But, someone else makes that decision for me. I can't make noise going down the road with load pipes, but my neighbor can wake me up at 7am Sunday morning with his lawnmower. I can't add anything but chrome to my motorcycle, so how's that going to improve my ability to express my "freedoms"? I can't get proper insurance coverage without paying a fourth of my wages to an insurance company because I would like to partake in a legal activity that they deem "dangerous". And finally, I can't take my bike or cage to anywhere but the dealer that sells them to work on the often updated electronic systems because if they gave up the information on how to work on them they might not be able to make a large enough gross profit for the year. Our freedoms are there for us, we just have to demand them.

I think ABATE of Wisconsin Inc's stance on noise issues is consistent to the freedoms we protect. As responsible adults it is our duty to use "throttle management" to keep from having loud pipes from becoming a felony offense (exaggerated only slightly). Also, as responsible adults, we are going to have to decide if we can still ride safe after a few beers or is it time to park the bike and call the ol'lady. ABATE of Wisconsin Inc will have to take a stance on drinking and riding in the very near future or run the risk of not being taken seriously by others that we associate with in the safety community. Just because we haven't written a stance about it officially, doesn't mean we haven't addressed these concerns amongst ourselves for some time now. I'm sure that at any bar that is a stop on one of our poker runs you can get a non-alcoholic drink for the same price or even less than a beer. If, you choose to do so. I haven't had a drink while riding for about six years now, and I know exactly what made me change my behavior. The law and the fact that the only friends I've had that have died while riding have also died while intoxicated. Doesn't mean I would too, but I didn't like the odds. It was my choice. I still like the option to drink if I so choose. "Adult beverage" and "adult choice" have one thing in common and it isn't a lie, "adult responsibility". We use adult responsibility while riding with or without a helmet. Every time we take to the road on our motorcycle we use adult responsibility to stay safe. Instinct and experience make us adults, common sense makes us responsible. I don't need anyone to tell me how to keep myself safe, that's my job. That's freedom.

So, as you take to the road this summer to attend one of the many biker events full of alcohol, noise, fun, and brotherhood; keep in mind that ABATE of Wisconsin Inc is working hard to keep your freedoms intact and we could always use some help. We have come a long way in the last 32 years and we'd really like everyone to join us in protecting our freedoms. You can now join online at [www.abatewis.org](http://www.abatewis.org). Be involved; remember it's your freedoms that we are fighting for. Until next month... Ride Free.



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