

News For Thought



Feds Decline to Increase Tarriffs on European Motorcycles

U.S. trade officials have decided not to include motorcycles on their lengthy list of European products that will soon face increased tariffs in retaliation for a European Union ban on imports of hormone-fed beef from America.

In public comments submitted to the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative opposing the possible 100% import duties, many motorcycle organizations, industry groups, manufacturers, dealers and others pointed to the extensive economic impact on businesses and jobs affected by such retaliatory tariffs, as well as a hardship for motorcycle enthusiasts. Also, motorcycle usage should be encouraged for fuel efficiency and easing traffic congestion and parking. U.S. Trade Representative Susan Schwab noted her office received approximately 600 comments regarding which of more than 100 European goods should be subjected to the tariffs.

"An interagency committee of trade experts and economists reviewed the public comments and provided recommendations to the USTR with respect to modifications that would result in a more effective action, while taking account of effects on the U.S. economy, including consumers," she said regarding the list of European Union products slated for tariff increases beginning March 23; but their beef with the EU will no longer threaten to double the price of imported Euro motorcycles and scooters.

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Myrtle Beach Says No to Bikers

Myrtle Beach has launched a website and printed brochures advising visitors that from the city's perspective, the May motorcycle rallies are over.

The Website bears a message from Mayor John Rhodes stating that the "Harley-Davidson Dealers Association Spring Rally and the Atlantic Beach Memorial Day Bikefest will not be held in Myrtle Beach", and lists 15 new laws the City Council has passed to discourage bikers from coming to town. Designed by the Myrtle Beach Chamber of Commerce, the top of the site proclaims; "effective 2009, Myrtle Beach, SC will no longer host motorcycle rallies."

To deter bikers, the city implemented stricter noise and muffler rules, will be enforcing a municipal helmet law, require eye protection while riding and a variety of restrictions on vendors, parties and motorcycle parking. The city passed a property tax increase to fund the anti-rally campaign.

But the Myrtle Beach Bike Week website counters this, saying that the rallies have not been cancelled. The Myrtle Beach Harley-Davidson website is still encouraging motorcyclists to come. It states that 90% of the events and most of the businesses that cater to the 500,000 bikers who come to the region during three weeks in May are in Horry County, which has not adopted any new ordinances and welcomes riders to the 69th annual event, scheduled for May 8th - 17th 2009, if the rally goes on. www.ON-A-BIKE.com

Ganging Up On Bikers

In an ongoing effort to reduce crimes committed by criminal street gangs, many states have passed or are considering anti-gang laws that loosely define "gangs", violate Constitutional protections and can be used to harass and intimidate motorcycle clubs and mainstream motorcycle groups.

North Carolina recently joined with California and Ohio in enacting tough gang legislation that enhances penalties by adding years onto the sentences for those convicted of a crime who are members of a gang.

The N.C. Street Gang Suppression Act is the state's first attempt to legally define a street gang, and it makes membership against the law. The law defines gangs as "any ongoing organization, association, or group of three or more persons" that has a primary activity of committing felony acts, has members involved in gang activity and has a common name, identifying sign or symbol."

It also gives law enforcement and government the authority to seize property

associated with gang activity.

Likewise, the Michigan legislature has enacted a set of "Gang Bills" and sent Senate Bill 291 to the governor's desk on January 6th. Based upon a similar definition of a "gang", the bill states that "If a person who is an associate or a member of a gang commits a felony or attempts to commit a felony and the person's association or membership in the gang provides the motive, means, or opportunity to commit the felony, the PERSON is guilty of a felony punishable by imprisonment for not more than 20 years."

In Utah, a newspaper ad for a Toys For Tots event and flyers distributed by the Vagos Motorcycle Club spurred one Garland, UT citizen to form a Neighborhood Watch and spearhead a grassroots effort to toughen state gang laws, resulting in five bills being introduced to toughen punishment for involvement in gang activity and to make associating with or being a member of a criminal street gang illegal in the Beehive State. The latest in a spate of gang legislation, the sponsor of the bills along with gang investigators spent months researching other states' gang laws to find ideas that may be effective in Utah, such as anti-gang loitering legislation and declaring gang-free zones. www.ON-A-BIKE.com

Weird News: Nigerian Riders Wear Fruit to Comply with New Helmet Law

As many as 98% of Nigeria's motorcyclists shunned the new national helmet law when it went into effect January 1st, leading to scores of arrests, near-riots and sometimes violent confrontations with traffic police. Professional motorcycle taxi drivers called Okada have now resorted to wearing fruit shells, pots or pieces of rubber tied to their heads with string to avoid arrest and impoundment of their vehicles.

In the state capital of Kaduna, hundreds of motorcyclists staged protests against the crash helmet directive, storming major roads chanting war songs and causing panic and traffic jams. In Lagos, at least 2,500 violators of the directive have so far been arrested as the Federal Road Safety Commission intensified the enforcement campaign for both riders and passengers. In Osun State, the Nigerian Tribune reported that no fewer than 73 motorcycles have been impounded by the FRSC because their operators failed to abide by the use of crash helmet.

The regulations have caused chaos around Africa's most populous nation, with motorcyclists complaining helmets are scarce, too expensive, dirty and some passengers refuse to wear them fearing they will catch skin disease or be put under a black magic spell. www.ON-A-BIKE.com

2009 NCOM Convention in Reno

The 24th annual NCOM Convention will be held Mother's Day weekend, May 7-10, 2009 at the Nugget Casino & Resort in Reno, Nevada. This annual gathering will draw bikers rights activists from across the country to discuss topics of concern to all motorcyclists, so reserve your room now for the special NCOM rate of \$89.00 by calling (800) 648-1177.

Meetings, seminars and group discussions will focus on safety issues, legal rights, legislative efforts and litigation techniques to benefit our right to ride and Freedom of the Road.

Registration fees for the NCOM Convention are \$75 including the Silver Spoke Awards Banquet on Saturday night, or \$40 for the Convention only. To pre-register, call the National Coalition of Motorcyclists at (800) 525-5355 or visit www.ON-A-BIKE.com.

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