

More News From Bill Bish New Year, New Laws

The New Year rang in several new laws across the country affecting the motorcycle riding community, including the onerous new California anti-noise law that requires EPA-labeling for motorcycle exhausts on bikes built after 2012.

Other less volatile laws also took effect on January 1st, including another California law that requires would-be motorcyclists under 21 to complete an approved safety course before an applicant can receive an instruction permit to learn to ride. California lawmakers also passed a law to curb motorcycle thefts by outlawing possession of so-called "pig-tails" which are homemade ignitions that allow a crook to start a motorcycle in as little as 20 seconds. Previously, burglary tools for the purpose of breaking into or stealing a vehicle other than a motorcycle were prohibited.

Several states have recently enacted legislation requiring the completion of a motorcycle training course before being issued a motorcycle license endorsement, and this year Connecticut and North Carolina join the growing list of states tightening restrictions on motorcycle licensure for newbie riders. In Oregon, a new training requirement went into effect to mandate safety classes for new motorcyclists under the age of 30, and the law will expand over the next few years to include all new riders regardless of age.

Already in the works for 2011, state legislatures are considering new laws to ban passengers under 8 years old in Virginia (House Bill 1850), allow Sunday motorcycle sales in Indiana (Senate Bill 108), and calls for a helmet law in Kentucky (House Bill 163). In Nebraska, Legislative Bill 62 has been filed to allow adult riders to opt out of the state's mandatory helmet law with the completion of an approved motorcycle safety course.

Fewer Businesses Selling Motorcycles, Parts & Accessories

There are 10,428 retail outlets in the United States that conduct business related to motorcycles, scooters or ATVs, down by more than 25% from 13,973 such businesses in 2009, according to the Motorcycle Industry Council.

These were the principle findings of the MIC 2010 Retail Outlet Audit, a summary of which the council sent to its members this week. The audit was completed in December 2010.

The report broke down the total by the number of retailers that sell new major-brand vehicles -- 5,134, or 49.2% -- and the number of retailers not selling new vehicles, but specializing in parts, accessories, apparel, used vehicles or service: 5,294, or 50.8%.

The MIC conducted its research by collecting information from all the manufacturers above, as well as from the trade magazines Dealernews and Motorcycle Product News. Because the study's sources vary from year to year, the MIC warns that comparisons with previous years are subject to "considerable error."

The report further indicates that 58.8% of the new vehicle retail outlets carry only one of the 13 major brands. Slightly less than one-fifth are dual-line outlets, and 21.9% carry three or more of the major brands. The total number of franchises distributed among the 5,134 new vehicle outlets declined 5.6% to 9,182 from 9,731 in 2009.

Europe To Mandate ABS Brakes

A European Union Commission has presented its proposal for new framework regulation for motorcycles. It plans to mandate anti-lock braking systems (ABS) for motorcycles with more than 125cc displacement from 2017 onwards.

Although the first anti-lock braking system was installed on a motorcycle in 1988, only 16% of all newly manufactured motorcycles in Europe were equipped with ABS, and by comparison car manufacturers have made ABS standard equipment since 2004 which has contributed to a 49% overall decline in fatal car accidents in the EU.

Experts regard anti-lock braking as a huge boost to safety. For example, a benefit analysis conducted for the European Commission calculates that the proposed regulation would reduce the number of fatal motorcycle accidents by more than 5,000 over a 10-year period.

A study presented by Vagverket, the Swedish highways authority, in October 2009 showed that 38% of all motorcycle accidents involving personal injury and 48% of all serious and fatal accidents, could have been prevented with ABS. This active safety system allows motorcyclists to brake safely in critical situations without locking the wheels, and thus without having to fear an inevitable fall. Braking distance is also significantly reduced.

The proposal is currently passing through the EU legislative procedure but will likely be adopted next year. The regulation will come into effect from 2017. In the U.S., the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has considered requiring ABS on new motorcycles sold in America, and will likely take up the issue in the near future.

Survey Says, Age Up, Quality Down

Bikers are getting older and they spend more at a motorcycle dealership they are happy with, according to a new ownership survey recently released by J.D. Power and Associates.

J.D. Power's 13th annual U.S. Motorcycle Competitive Information Study also reveals that motorcycle quality has dipped to 2008 levels, with 152 problems reported per 100 motorcycles (PPM) -- an increase of 29 PPM. One half of owners surveyed reported that most of those problems (44%) are engine related, and the study suggests that gearshift problems, clutch chatter, and insufficient engine power have the greatest impact on overall satisfaction.

The study cites a few no-brainers, like the fact that "Sales volumes and revenue of ancillary goods and services tend to be considerably higher -- by an average of \$957 -- at motorcycle dealerships that provide a highly satisfying experience vs. dealerships that do not."

But the causal relationship between customer satisfaction and dollars spent is less ominous than their findings that the average rider age has risen from 40 to 49 since 2001, "an indication that many owners may soon exit the market"... combined with the study's findings that first-time motorcycle buyers are on the decline, makes it all the more imperative that the motorcycle industry seeks to capture the interest of younger riders who might consider buying their first bike.

QUOTABLE QUOTE: "Political tags - such as royalist, communist, democrat, populist, fascist, liberal, conservative, and so forth - are never basic criteria. The human race divides politically into those who want people to be controlled and those who have no such desire."

Robert Anson Heinlein (1907-1988) American author and science fiction writer



Sun. January 23, 2011, Peotone IL

27th Annual Peotone Motorcycle Show & Parts Expo, Peotone IL

Sat. February 5, 2011, Chicago, IL

27th Annual Chicago Motorcycle Show & Parts Expo at McCormick Place, Chicago, IL

Sun. March 20, 2011, Kalamazoo, MI

38th Annual Kalamazoo Motorcycle Swap Meet in Wings Stadium Kalamazoo, MI

Saturday April 23, 2011, Cadillac MI

8th Annual Motorcycle Swap Meet in the Wexford County Civic Center, Cadillac, MI

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