

News For Thought



Michigan Poised To Repeal Helmet Law

After decades of protesting Michigan's 42-year old helmet law at rallies at the State Capitol, motorcyclists converged on the statehouse on Wednesday, June 8 for a "Call To Victory Rally" in anticipation of a repeal bill making it to the desk of newly elected Governor Rick Snyder.

Gov. Snyder has not committed either way, but he replaced Jennifer Granholm who twice vetoed repeals that were approved by the state legislature in 2006 and 2008. It appears that lawmakers are once again poised to approve legislation that will allow freedom of choice for many of Michigan's 241,000 motorcyclists.

The Senate Transportation Committee recently passed a repeal measure that will soon go before the full Senate, while a similar bill is pending in the House of Representatives. The Senate bill would allow those 21 and older to ride without a helmet if they have had a motorcycle endorsement for two or more years, or have passed a safety course. The House bill would allow those 21 and older to ride without a helmet if they have a \$20,000 medical policy in place.

Vince Consiglio, state director of ABATE of Michigan, said there are enough votes in both chambers to change the helmet law. "We're not opposed to helmets, but it should be a choice," Consiglio says, adding that the issue ought to be the education of motorcyclists and drivers of other vehicles to avoid collisions in the first place. ABATE pushes motorcycle training and education for riders, and awareness for those in other vehicles.

The battle over helmets has also been waged in courtrooms across the state, with A.I.M. Attorney Larry "Katman" Katkowski challenging the enforcement of the law on behalf of ABATE and the Michigan Confederation of Motorcycle Clubs. www.ON-A-BIKE.com

Alabama May Expand Motorcycle Licensing Requirements

Alabama is the only state where a person can get a motorcycle license without ever sitting on a motorcycle. Would-be motorcyclists as young as 14 don't have to take a skills test to obtain a license, just a written one.

Rep. Allen Farley, R-Jefferson, and eight co-sponsors are behind the House version of a bill (HB-576) to require graduated licenses and mandate testing that includes riding. It would require future motorcycle licenses to include a written test and a skills test for ages 14-17. It also would introduce a graduated driver's license law that would restrict motorcycle operations for ages 14-17.

"Issuing a motorcycle license with a written test and no skills test is just setting people up for failure. The lack for a mandate of training and education can be directly linked to reports of accidents," said Richard Randolph, Alabama Motorcycle Safety program manager. "Sixty-nine percent of all motorcycle-involved accidents, the cause was the motorcycle operator. That's steady year in, year out."

Currently, there are 47 state-legislated rider training programs in the United States and all but five US states waive motorcyclist license testing for graduates of rider training courses. Only 15 states require completion of a rider ed course to obtain a motorcycle endorsement, usually for riders aged 18-21. www.ON-A-BIKE.com

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Vermont To Create Military License Plate For Motorcycles

Vermont will soon have a special motorcycle license plate to honor Vermont's veteran and active duty members of the military who ride.


Governor Peter Shumlin signed the bill into law on Tuesday, May 24, and it takes affect on July 1. The new law

also allows members of the military to get veteran license plates before they retire. The governor's office says in the past military personnel who have made a career of their service would have had to retire to receive the plate.

Adrian "Andy" Megrath, president of the Vietnam Veterans of America Rutland Chapter, told The Republic newspaper that the motorcycle plate is another way of showing "how proud we are of veterans, and how many of us there are."

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Traffic Fines Bolster Budgets

The economic downturn has put loads of stress on state and municipal budgets across the country, and with strong public pressure against raising taxes lawmakers are raising traffic fines instead. Communities and state governments are looking to balance their budgets on the backs of drivers, using the boost in revenue from traffic tickets to help pay their bills.

"Police are having a quick trigger finger," says Gary Biller, executive director of the National Motorists Association. "There's less tolerance, and tickets are being issued much quicker. We know the pressure being put on governments, but it doesn't justify what's going on."

Speed limits were originally intended to conserve fuel during the energy crisis of the 70s, but

have evolved into a \$4.5-\$6 billion industry according to NMA estimates. FoxNews.com recently reported that looming budget gaps have turned the roadways into a jungle for motorists, and cite the following examples of over-exuberant penalties across the country:

- * Parking in a fire lane in Pensacola, Fla., will cost you \$100, up from \$10.
- * Georgia recently added a \$200 surcharge for anyone driving more than 85 miles per hour.
- * Colorado increased fines for speeding from \$50 to \$135.
- * Portland, Ore., increased fines for parking in a handicapped spot from \$190 to \$450.
- * Parking fines in Boston doubled to \$40.
- * Speeding in Florida just 10 miles over the legal limit will cost you \$196, up from \$154.

Despite the increase in traffic citations, along with increased fines and fees, an estimated 95% of motorists simply pay up and don't bother to fight their tickets in court. www.ON-A-BIKE.com

New Hampshire Prohibits Motorcycle-Only Checkpoints

In an unprecedented victory on the motorcyclists' rights front, New Hampshire became the first state to bar motorcycle-only roadside checkpoints. HB 148, co-sponsored by longtime biker activist State Rep. Sherm Packard, prohibits the acceptance of federal funding for the discriminatory roadblocks.

"No law enforcement agency of the state or a political subdivision of the state may accept federal funding the purpose of which is to establish motorcycle-only roadside checkpoints," states the new law, which takes effect 60 days after passage.

Packard was one of the first biker-legislators in the country, and as an original member of the NCOM Legislative Task Force he literally wrote the book on "Getting Elected To Public Office", a pamphlet that can be ordered free of charge through the National Coalition of Motorcyclists at (800) 525-5355 or via the internet at www.ON-A-BIKE.com.

On the flipside, however, Virginia recently joined New York, Georgia, Utah and Maine in conducting such controversial roadblocks, with the Arlington County Police Department setting up a motorcycle-only checkpoint on May 28th during the annual Rolling Thunder POW/MIA rally in Washington D.C. over Memorial Day weekend. Also, on May 16th ABATE of New York held their annual Freedom Rally/Ride to the Capitol and as participants departed in small groups to return home, law enforcement units pulled over many of the riders and issued numerous citations of dubious legitimacy, primarily for helmets and exhausts.

"This ride has been held without incident for 15 years," said Robert "Prospector" Boellner, a member of the NCOM Board of Directors representing the New England states, adding; "It is believed that this action by New York State Police was retaliation for a class-action lawsuit filed by AIM Attorney Mitch Proner against state police and DMV to stop the practice of motorcycle-only roadblocks." www.ON-A-BIKE.com

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