

ABATE Still Exists!

Dave "Chubby" Charlebois-Public Relations Director

As I make my way around to events in Wisconsin, I run into quite a few people that still ask, "What is ABATE?". Well, in Wisconsin, it stands for "A Brotherhood Against Totalitarian Enactments". If that sounds like a mouthful, maybe I'd better explain. ABATE of Wisconsin Inc was formed in 1974 to repeal our mandatory helmet law that was enacted in 1966 when our legislators yielded to the federal governments "Safety Act". Those of you that prefer to not wear a lid can thank ABATE of Wisconsin Inc, and both the CMW, and WBBA, for their efforts in organizing protests that brought almost 50,000 bikers to Madison. Wisconsin's helmet law was repealed in 1978. Most people think that ABATE died right then and there. Not so! After the 1978 repeal, ABATE of Wisconsin Inc moved on and continued to fight for the rights of all bikers. Helmet laws were introduced in our state legislature over 10 times since the late 70's, and ABATE has successfully led the way in quashing all of them. Now, this doesn't mean we don't think bikers shouldn't wear helmets, it means we should all have the right to decide. I think everyone can appreciate that.

ABATE of Wisconsin Inc is not just about repealing helmet laws, though, our primary goals are legislation, education, and safety. In the old days a lot of people wore shirts that stated "I AM NOT A PUBLIC BURDEN". It has been ABATE's job to prove that for the last 32 years. We have received over a dozen awards for not only our legislative efforts, but for our education programs also. ABATE of Wisconsin Inc members have been running our award winning Safe Rider program since 1990 and have provided motorcycle safety instruction to hundreds of riders with both beginner and experienced classes offered each year. We provide awareness materials throughout the state each year during Motorcycle Awareness Month (May), to let the cagers know that we're out there. That's right, the "Be Aware, Motorcycles are Everywhere" billboards are ours. You also might hear our public service announcements on the radio. We also provide awareness instruction to driver's education classes with our Share the Road program. Educating the public is a big part of staying safe on the roads.

Now, I already mentioned that ABATE is about more than just helmet laws. So, I'd like to briefly recognize some of the legislation that ABATE has been a big part of over the last three decades.

-1983 AB129 passed, permitting motorcycles to park in groups at an angle in parallel parking spaces. That's right, before this, cops in Milwaukee were writing ticket for the tires being to far from the curb. How would you have liked to park parallel

during the hundredth in Milwaukee?

-1997 SB618 Vehicle Confiscation Bill enacted. Specific to motorcycles, mandates that a confiscated motorcycle be returned unless formal forfeiture is started within 30 days. Before this, they could keep your bike indefinitely while charges were dreamed up against you.

-2000 Motorcycles successfully excluded from vehicle color-reporting bill while in committee.

-2000 Motorcycles successfully excluded from vehicle noise bill while in committee.

-2004 SB223 Legislative remedy for Wisconsin Supreme Court helmet ruling. I was trying to exclude helmet bills, but this bill made it impossible for juries to reduce awards to zero when you are engaged in a legal activity (like riding) without a helmet.

-2005 Transportation Equity Act (TEA). Quick response from ABATE organizations throughout the U.S. kept a defacto helmet law from being added to money designated for our state highway construction. Again, I know that I said I'd keep away from the helmet law stuff, but we were one day away from a national helmet law when our efforts paid off and the amendment was dropped.

-2006 Roadway Users Responsibility Act 466. This law enhances right of way violation penalties, allows motorcycles, mopeds and bicycles to run a vehicle actuated red light after 45 seconds when it won't recognize their vehicle; and make motorcycle awareness a mandatory part of drivers education classes throughout the State of Wisconsin. ABATE of Wisconsin Inc worked closely with Sen. Zien and Rep Pridemore in the writing of this bill.

ABATE of Wisconsin Inc works diligently to provide a united voice for bikers no matter what kind of bike you ride, or even whether you are a member or not. All of this is accomplished by a volunteer grassroots effort. That's right, volunteer. The only paid employees of ABATE of Wisconsin Inc are the gals working in the state office. If any of the things I mentioned pertain to the way you like to ride, you need to be a member. We have volunteers in vendor spots at events throughout the state. Instead of turning a blind eye when you see us, stop by and see what's going on. We work for you. There are about 6000 active members in Wisconsin and we could always use a few more. To find out more about becoming a member of ABATE of Wisconsin Inc, check out our website at www.abatewis.org or call our state office at 1-800-386-4442. If you know a member, join them in attending a regional meeting. Or, if \$25 a year is too much to spend to protect your freedom of the road, please support our member businesses and events. Remember, freedom is not free.

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