

# News For Thought



## Oregon Enacts Mandatory Training for New Motorcyclists

Oregon has become the third state to pass a law requiring all new motorcyclists regardless of age to pass a rigorous training course, in hopes of reducing accidents and fatalities. Current law requires such course completion for prospective riders under age 21.

The new law, Senate Bill 546, passed by the state legislature this year will phase in the requirement for all first-time bikers over the next six years. Lawmakers also voted to double the fine for riders caught without the proper license, increasing the penalty to \$720 starting in January.

Team Oregon trained about ten-thousand riders last year, and the majority of them were older than 21. More than 4,400 people bypassed the class in favor of a free skills test at the DMV, but soon all first-time riders will have to shell out about \$150 to take the Team Oregon course, which is administered by Oregon State University.

The change in the law was supported by one of the state's chief motorcycle lobbies, BikePAC. Executive director Nic Oliver says he's been riding for 35 years and he thinks the new requirement will save lives: "A trained rider is a safe rider. And we're trying to cut down the deaths, especially the unnecessary deaths of people that are making stupid mistakes because they don't know what to do."

A similar mandatory training bill was recently passed in North Carolina, but was amended to require rider education courses only for those under 18. Senate Bill 64, which also limits learners permits to 12 months with one 6 month renewal, was signed into law August 26th by Governor Mike Easley and goes into effect January 1, 2011. [www.ON-A-BIKE.com](http://www.ON-A-BIKE.com)

pocketknives.

The bipartisan measure would exempt assisted-opening knives that can only be opened with "exertion applied to the blade by hand, wrist or arm" from a federal law that criminalizes commerce in switchblades. Assisted opening knives are highly desired by hunters, anglers, farmers, ranchers, firefighters, law enforcement and emergency personnel and others who may need to open a knife with only one hand.

Senator Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) said, "Without this amendment, there is a real danger that 80 percent of the pocketknives sold in the U.S. could be classified as illegal switchblades, which would hurt knife and tool manufacturers across the nation."

The measure is now under consideration in a House-Senate Conference Committee. [www.ON-A-BIKE.com](http://www.ON-A-BIKE.com)

## Weird News: Beware Drunkards Crossing

A German court ruled on September 14 that a motorcyclist who collided with a drunken pedestrian during a beer fest shared blame for the accident because she should have expected the road to be full of party-goers.

The female biker, who was driving at a legal speed of 25-31 mph hit a man who was crossing the road against a red light during the Munich beer festival which attracts millions of revelers every year.

The court held her "50 percent responsible" for the accident. "During the October (beer) festival there are, it is well known to the authorities, a large number of drunk people on the streets at night, who can not always be trusted to observe the rules of the road," the court said. "The motorcyclist should have adjusted her speed to be able to avoid these people," added the statement.

The woman was ordered to pay half of the damages, estimated at 2,500 euros (\$3,600 US), and her bid for 1,000 euros compensation for minor injuries sustained in the accident was refused. [www.ON-A-BIKE.com](http://www.ON-A-BIKE.com)

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## Noise Laws Defeated

The Massachusetts Motorcycle Association has announced that a proposed noise ordinance in North Reading, MA that would have required an EPA Stamp on motorcycle exhaust systems and stricter noise controls has been defeated.

Prior to a recent meeting of town Selectmen, MMA Chairman Dave Condon met with MMA Member Bill McGarry, a local resident, to review the warrant and the pertinent Massachusetts laws. During an earlier town meeting, the legality of the EPA stamp requirement was discussed in detail and ultimately dropped, but an alternative proposal was amended into the Warrant which would have made noise levels and testing requirements stricter than those currently in Massachusetts General Law (MGL).

With significant support from McGarry, who attended both public hearings and spoke on behalf of the MMA and motorcyclists across Massachusetts, the Selectmen and North Reading Chief of Police recognized that the town cannot impose laws stricter than the Commonwealth -- instead, the town acknowledged that enforcement of the existing MGL coupled with appropriate education could be a far more effective tool, and by vote of the selectmen the warrant was removed from the town agenda. Meanwhile, following much lobbying and testimony from local bikers, a hotly debated noise ordinance in Portland, Maine was unanimously rejected by the City Council and sent back to the Public Safety Committee for more work.

The proposal would have enforced the federal law that all motorcycles made after Dec. 31, 1982 must have mufflers with an EPA label certifying the exhaust system meets EPA standards. A biker riding a motorcycle within city limits without an EPA sticker on the muffler would have been fined \$50. The ordinance would have been the first of its kind in Maine, and supporters said its adoption would have made it easier to pass a similar state law.

Opponents, including the United Bikers of Maine (UBM), said the measure would discriminate against motorcyclists and could cost the city tourism dollars by discouraging motorcyclists from visiting Portland.

Motorcycle noise continues to be a contentious and controversial issue across the country, with places like Boston and New York contemplating stricter laws.

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## Motorcycle Fatalities Plummet In Texas

While most states across the country continue to experience increases in motorcycle accidents and fatalities in the wake of increasing motorcycle usage, the state of Texas has reported a significant decrease in rider deaths due largely to safety and awareness programs initiated by motorcyclists and the Texas Department of Transportation. According to TxDOT, fatalities declined more than 23% over the same time period from 2008, with 264 deaths reported from January 1 - August 24, 2009, versus 344 deaths the previous year.

"I would say this is a direct result of the Texas Transportation Institute put together to cut down on Traffic fatalities, especially for motorcyclist," explained Sputnik, State Chairman of the Texas Motorcycle Rights Association (TMRA-II) and Chairman of the National Coalition of Motorcyclists Legislative Task Force (NCOM-LTF). "Several of our members sit on the Board of that newly formed Institute."

Sputnik gave further credit to the Motorcycle Awareness Program put together by TxDOT at riders' insistence and added; "We have very high hopes that SB 1967 (a multi-faceted motorcycle safety bill enacted earlier this year) and the year round airing of Public Service Announcements, increased penalties for negligence and Rider Training will bring that number down even farther."

Texas is one of the largest motorcycling states in the nation in terms of motorcycle registrations and year-round riding weather, and largely through the efforts of TMRA-II under Sputnik's leadership repealed their mandatory helmet law in 1997. [www.ON-A-BIKE.com](http://www.ON-A-BIKE.com)

**Quotable Quote:** "Be as beneficent as the sun or the sea, but if your rights as a rational being are trampled on, die on the first inch of your territory."

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-82) American poet and philosopher

## U.S. Senate Passes Amendment Protecting Knife Owners

In response to a U.S. Customs proposal that would outlaw one-handed assisted opening knives by redefining them as switchblades, on July 9th the U.S. Senate unanimously passed an amendment to the Federal Switchblade Act as part of the Homeland Security appropriations bill to protect by law 35 million Americans who own

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