

News For Thought



NORTH CAROLINA INCREASES PENALTIES FOR RIGHT OF WAY VIOLATORS In the waning days of session on July 13, the North Carolina House of Representatives voted 113-3 to concur with the Senate-passed version HB - 965, which increases penalties for people who fail to yield the right-of-way if the violation causes serious bodily injury in a wreck. "This bill does not have to go to the governor, so it's now law," said Sam Nobles, Legislative Coordinator for the Concerned Bikers Association. "It becomes effective December 1st." The bill requires a \$500 fine and 90-day suspension of a driver's license if serious bodily injury occurs from wreck where a motorist did not yield the right-of-way. "We not only scored the first win for the bikers of North Carolina," said Nobles, "we left a network in place and built relationships that will continue to serve us well."

BIKERS NOT TO BLAME, SAY INSURERS Two-thirds of motorcycle accidents involving other vehicles in Victoria, Australia are not caused by the motorcyclists, new insurance figures show. Data from insurance claims showed drivers caused 68 per cent of the multiple-vehicle crashes involving motorcycles in Victoria between 2001 and 2003, according to national motorcycle insurer Swann Insurance. The figures, reported on July 5, 2004, also showed that during the same period drivers were responsible for more than 70 per cent of the accidents involving motorbikes in New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, South Australia and Western Australia. Swann Insurance general manager Duncan Brain said: "These figures confirm what motorcycle riders have been saying for some time -- that motorcyclists generally are not to blame for multiple-vehicle crashes."

A helmet would be good, but police said clothes would be a nice start when riding a motorcycle. A local dentist pleaded guilty to disorderly conduct for driving a motorcycle with a naked woman on the back. The woman faces more serious charges. Dr. Joseph P. Gronka, 39, was pulled over June 12 when police noticed Lisa Drozdowski, 39, riding naked on the back of his motorcycle. Since then, Gronka has paid \$277.50 in court costs and fines. Gronka declined comment. Police said Drozdowski was belligerent when she was taken into custody and threw a small pipe into her cell toilet, then kicked an officer who tried to prevent her from flushing the toilet. She was charged with aggravated assault, simple assault, tampering with evidence, resisting arrest and open lewdness.

REFLECTIVE VESTS REQUIRED FOR MILITARY MOTORCYCLISTS Military safety regulations for motorcycle riders have long been the strictest in the world, requiring such personal protective equipment (PPE) as helmets, eye protection, full-fingered gloves, over the ankle boots, long sleeve shirts and long pants, both on and off base, and for both military and civilians who operate motorcycles on military installations. Now, according to the military newspaper Stars and Stripes in their July 13th Pacific edition, Pacific Air Force bases (PACAF) have released stricter new rules for motorcyclists set forth in the service's traffic safety program. Besides a requirement for motorcycle safety training, and a refresher course every three years, the most noticeable change is the requirement that all motorcycle riders wear an international orange or lime-green safety vest with 90 square inches of reflective material. The PACAF supplement was released May 17 and already is being enforced at most bases, according to military officials. The Air Force requires that riders wear a brightly-colored and contrasting long-sleeve shirt or jacket. A spokesman from PACAF's safety office said that the vest was adopted to "clarify the wide array of possibilities left open" by the Air Force instruction.

"Each installation interpreted this standard differently and enforced it differently," the spokesman said. "The colors chosen reflect the most internationally recognized safety colors. They are highly visible and signify 'Safety' or 'Attention' around the globe." Most PACAF bases have adopted former Commander General William Begert's zero-tolerance policy to enforce the vest rule: First-time violators lose motorcycle-driving privileges for 15 days; a second citation within 12 months results in a 30-day suspension; and a third ticket in a year equals no riding for 12 months. But some motorcyclists feel that it cramps their style since it doesn't allow them to show off their club colors. Others voiced their concern that the bright vest might make any military member off base a target to would-be terrorists. "Wearing the vest makes the motorcycle no more safe," added one rider.

\$50 GRAND AWARDED FOR ARIZONA SAFETY CAMPAIGN \$50,000 was recently awarded from Arizona's Motorcycle Safety Fund to be earmarked for a billboard campaign to heighten awareness of motorcycles within the motoring public. "It's official," exclaimed Bobbi Hartmann, ABATE of Arizona Lobbyist, "I signed the contract today (June 15, 2004) and the lobbyists will be meeting with Viacom to determine specific locations for the 35 - 12' x 24' billboards in the Phoenix and metropolitan areas." According to Viacom Outdoor, these billboards should be up and running by the end of July for an eight week contract period, though many billboard messages stay visible until the board is sold again and printed over. The money used comes from \$1.00 extra paid by motorcyclists for their registration, equaling \$80,000 collected annually which, thanks to lobbyists from ABATE of Arizona, the MMA of Arizona and the Arizona Confederation of Motorcycle Clubs (ACMC), is put into a dedicated fund for promoting motorcycle awareness. The remaining balance was used for motorcycle training and other safety projects.

JUST YOUR AVERAGE MOTORCYCLIST According to the Motorcycle Industry Council, a typical motorcyclist is a 38-year-old man with a wife, kids, college degree and \$44,250 annual income. The MIC reports more than 4.3 million women operated motorcycles last year, up 34 percent from 1998. According to the Motorcycle Safety Foundation, one out of every three new riders enrolling in training school is female. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, motorcycle fatalities remain a largely male phenomenon. After five years of declining rates, motorcycle deaths began rising again in 1997 along with increased popularity of motorcycles -- and 90 percent of the deaths are among men.

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