

Bruce on Bikers' Rights

© Copyright 2009 Bruce Arnold (Bruce@LdrLongDistanceRider.com)

April 2009

WHY ATGATTERS COULD CARE LESS ABOUT LID LAWS *And Why Some MROs Must Either Evolve or Face Extinction*

These are trying economic times for many bikers, especially downed riders, riders down on their luck, and the loved ones who depend(ed) on them. If you can, please lend a hand.



The American Motorcyclist Association (“AMA”) is the world’s largest and most influential motorcyclists’ rights organization (“MRO”). With nearly 300,000 members, their base far exceeds that of the Motorcycle Riders Foundation (“MRF”) and all of its ABATE confederates combined. In the Sunshine State, for example, the AMA has five times the membership of ABATE of Florida, an ailing SMRO whose ranks have been thinning for some time now.

One reason the AMA thrives as other MROs struggle to survive is their *independence* and *inclusiveness*: It is neither a front for nor subverted by ambulance-chasing attorneys, and it represents *all* American motorcyclists. The AMA does not discriminate based on age, gender, race, creed, religion, ride or political affiliation. One could say they have lesser tolerance for intolerance than some of their diminutive and declining counterparts. The focus of the AMA is strictly our “Right to Ride”. Gold- and yes even Silver-Wingers are welcome, but left- and right-wingers check their non-riding agendas at the door.

That is not to say, however, that the AMA is a single-issue organization. *Far from it!* Preserving and protecting our “Right to Ride” requires that we address a lengthy list of problems and challenges, including but not limited to our freedom to choose not only what we ride and where we ride, but what we wear when we ride as well. Here is what the AMA recommends:

“The AMA, as part of a comprehensive motorcycle safety program to help reduce injuries and fatalities in the event of a motorcycle crash, strongly encourages the use of personal protective equipment, including gloves, sturdy footwear and a properly fitted motorcycle helmet certified by its manufacturer to meet the DOT standard.”

And because the AMA is “pro-helmet”, many freedom fighters (and forum posers) accuse them of being “pro-helmet law”, but NOTHING COULD BE FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH. Here is what the AMA says about mandatory motorcycle helmet laws:

“[W]hile we strongly encourage helmet use, we also firmly believe there are already too many intrusive laws, too much regulation, too many hands in your pocket and not enough legislative thought given to the importance of personal responsibility. That’s why we believe that adults, by right and by accumulated experience, should maintain their ability to choose whatever equipment is appropriate for them. They don’t need the government to decide.”

The AMA stands ready to fight for our freedom of choice, as well as the rest of the “Right to Ride” agenda. And I don’t mean just with web postings, either. I mean challenging federal

Nannycrats, lobbying state legislators, confronting city councils, and motivating their massive membership through action alerts like those you'll find regularly updated here:

<http://capwiz.com/amacycle/issues/>

Having encouraged the AMA to issue some of these alerts, I can assure you they are more interested in results than recognition. Just ask Robert "RC" Conroy of Florida about their support for FTY/ROWV Stiffer Penalties Bills HB1161/SB968 ... Rich Paukner of Connecticut about their assistance with the City of Hartford's new noise ordinance ... or John Bland of Nevada about their endorsement of Motorcyclists' Freedom of Choice Bill AB300.

My position on helmets and helmet laws is the same as that of the AMA, as stated here:

<http://www.amadirectlink.com/legisltn/positions/helmet.asp>

In short, LIDS YES ... LID LAWS NO. That seems simple enough, but with some it just doesn't sink in. Some seem fundamentally incapable of differentiating the utility of helmets from the futility of helmet mandates. Instead, they continue attacking "the lid" rather than "the law" by spewing spurious statements like this:

"This is a group with a core premise that helmets are detrimental to safety."

THAT is one reason why those who espouse ATGATT (wearing 'A'll 'T'he 'G'ear 'A'll 'T'he 'T'ime) eschew what they call the "anti-helmet fanatics", and steer clear of any helmet law debates where they might be seen as siding with them. Sure, they know that cases of helmet-related injury have been documented. But they also know those cases to be contrary to the norm, and few and far between. Yes, ATGATTers know the claim that "*helmets are detrimental to safety*" is false. But what they fail to appreciate is that adding one small word makes it true:

Helmet LAWS are detrimental to safety.

That's right, ATGATTers. Helmet LAWS are detrimental to the safety of motorcyclists. The AMA hints at the reason why:

"Being safe requires more than a helmet, and that's why we maintain that using a helmet is only one part of a comprehensive approach to rider safety. The AMA has long been a strong advocate of things like motorcycle rider education, improved licensing and testing, riding unimpaired by alcohol, drugs or distraction, and increased public awareness—all of which contribute to preventing crashes in the first place (something a helmet does not do). And we can all agree that avoiding a crash is far better than crashing more safely."

And I paraphrase here one of my many prior attempts to get the point across:

"The Law of Unintended Consequences tells us almost all human actions will have at least one unexpected result. Nowhere do we see this axiom substantiated more than in social legislation and public policy in general, and mandatory motorcycle helmet laws in particular. Helmet laws are the quintessence of "feel good" legislation. They are aggressively promoted by Haddonistic safetycrats as the cure-all for motorcycle safety, when the truth is that statistics provided by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration ("NHTSA") indicate that in 2006 if we had

*strapped a helmet on the head of every American motorcyclist for every mile they road for the entire year, no more than 747 lives would have been saved. I am not saying that those 747 lives are not important, but the sad fact is that they represent less than 16% of the 4,810 motorcycle fatalities that occurred in 2006 (2,792--58%--of which were wearing helmets and died anyway). **What I am saying is that by focusing on a policy that impacts only 16% of the problem, we take attention, awareness and resources away from initiatives that would have a far better chance of reducing human suffering and saving lives by addressing the other 84 percent.***

THE BOTTOM LINE IS THIS:

Unless and until the well-intended but ill-informed “anti-lidders” in their base stop attacking helmets for the wrong reasons and start attacking helmet LAWS for the right ones, our MROs in decline will never convince ATGATers to join their aging and thinning ranks. And without fresh blood and diverse DNA for *evolution*, their destiny will certainly be *extinction*.

Speaking strictly for myself and no other individuals or organizations,

Bruce Arnold

Bruce@LdrLongDistanceRider.com

Author and Publisher, LdrLongDistanceRider.com

Founder & Co-Moderator, Bruce-n-RC's Biker Forum

Mile Eater Gold Member, Iron Butt Association (IBA)

Sustaining Member, Motorcycle Riders Foundation (MRF)

2009 Chairman's Circle, American Motorcyclist Association (AMA)

P.S. My thanks again to Ed Moreland, whose “Sex, Politics, Religion...and Helmets” Viewpoint on page 14 of this month's American Motorcyclist magazine inspired this article; and to Imre Sautzer, a freedom fighter who walks the walk as well as he talks the talk.