

# *Bruce on Bikers' Rights*

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## **SLACKTIVISTS, LOBBYISTS, ADVOCATES & ACTIVISTS**

*The Farces and Forces of Motorcyclists' Rights*



A couple of weeks ago, New Jersey Iron Butt rider extraordinaire **John Ryan** rode 5,645 miles--from Prudhoe Bay, Alaska to Key West, Florida--in 86 hours 31 minutes, setting a new record for the IBA's Ultimate Coast-to-Coast ("UCC") run. John was successful not only because he rode hard, but also because he rode smart. In other words, in addition to skill, strength and fortitude, he demonstrated his ability to set a goal and implement an effective strategy in achieving it.

Just as "making the distance" is our goal in endurance riding, "making a difference" should be our goal in motorcyclists' rights. And in a world of finite resources and conflicting priorities, to make a difference we have to work smart as well as hard, and do the best we can with what we have. In choosing what we want to accomplish, and more importantly what we are willing to sacrifice to make it happen, we define ourselves in the spectrum of the farces and forces of motorcyclists' rights:

### **SLACKTIVISTS**

Quoting from Snopes.com:

*"We can't claim credit for having coined this term, nor do we know its actual origin, but we love it nonetheless. Slacktivism is the search for the ultimate feel-good that derives from having come to society's rescue without actually getting one's hands dirty, volunteering any of one's time, or opening one's wallet. It's slacktivism that prompts us to forward appeals for business cards on behalf of a dying child intent upon having his name recorded in the Guinness World Book of Records, or exhortations to others to continue circulating a particular e-mail because some big company has supposedly promised that every forward will generate monies for the care of a languishing tot. Likewise, it's slacktivism that prompts us to want to join a boycott of designated gas companies, or eschew buying gasoline on a particular day rather than reduce our personal consumption of fossil fuels by driving less and taking the bus more often. Slacktivism comes in many forms, but its defining characteristic is its central theme of doing good with little or no effort on the part of the person inspired to participate, through the mechanisms of forwarding, exhorting, collecting, or e-signing."*

This definition applies without exception to more than a few in our ranks. And to it I would add, in the language if not the words of Jeff Foxworthy, *"If you believe that Internet forum-posting without in-the-streets followup is 'freedom fighting', then you just might be a slacktivist."*

### **LOBBYISTS**

Whereas the real motivation (pardon the irony) of a slacktivist may be to pass the time, the expected motivation for a lobbyist is to pass a bill. Lobbying refers specifically to advocacy efforts that attempt to influence legislation, and comes in two basic flavors: "Grassroots

lobbying" is appealing to the general public to contact the legislature about an issue. "Direct lobbying" is contacting government officials or employees directly to influence legislation.

There are many lobbyists, paid and unpaid, professional and volunteer, who have made a real and positive difference in the motorcyclists' rights arena. **Charles Umbenhauer** is one good example:

<http://tinyurl.com/mlmlwx>

On the other hand, our movement has suffered from the unintended consequences of our hired guns' stated best intentions:

<http://tinyurl.com/lw27z6>

And in some instances, those stated intentions may have cloaked a questionable agenda:

<http://tinyurl.com/nkev2w>

## ADVOCATES

Advocacy can be defined as *"the pursuit of influencing outcomes--including public policy and resource allocation decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions."* And although some use the words synonymously, there is a distinction between advocacy and lobbying: Although all lobbyists are advocates, not all advocates are lobbyists.

There are many ways to work within the system as a bikers' rights advocate other than strictly by lobbying for or against legislation. Organizing, raising money and volunteering for public Motorcycle Awareness campaigns is one. The "**Check Twice - Save A Life**" initiative is one of many good examples you'll find in the "Motorcycle Awareness" link list here:

<http://tinyurl.com/ksdyae>

Another laudable form of bikers' rights advocacy is to champion the cause and come to the aid of fallen riders and their families, as does **Paul Cote** and the **Massachusetts Motorcyclists Survivor's Fund**:

<http://tinyurl.com/ngk6c9>

## ACTIVISTS

I have been guilty at times of using the terms "activist" and "advocate" interchangeably, but they are not. The distinction is in how far they are willing to go to accomplish their socio-political objectives: The focus of the advocate is to effect change by working "within the system". For the activist the focus is to accomplish the objective, even if doing so requires non-violent civil disobedience, or "defying the system" in order to change it.

Unlike thousands of Colonials who meekly protested British tyranny, John Hancock, Thomas Jefferson and the 53 other patriots who signed our Declaration of Independence on July 4th 1776 took action. And unlike the tens of thousands of slacktivists who flooded forums and inboxes

with indignant postings about Myrtle Beach's new anti-biker ordinances, one hundred freedom-fighting activists actually showed up to make a stand against that discrimination:

<http://tinyurl.com/c67rwe>

## **WHAT ARE YOU WILLING TO DO?**

Riding a motorcycle defines you as a motorcyclist. And what you do (or don't do) to protect your **Right-to-Ride** not only defines your place in the spectrum above, but also impacts the future of motorcycling in America. So I ask again:

What are **YOU** willing to do?

Speaking strictly for myself and no other individuals or organizations,

Bruce Arnold

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