

IT'S TIME TO DO SOMETHING!

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“Make our new riders safer by making them get some professional training during licencing.”

I guess we all get to a point with some topic at some time when we “just have to say something”. I’ve reached it now with the subject of road safety.

Christmas was another “festive” season but tainted by the continuous count of deaths on our roads. The “score” just kept on going up and made it well past last year’s gory total in the first few days of the happy season. Again, we motorcyclists made our presence felt by being 25 per cent of the death toll, while we are only three per cent of the registered fleet.

The speed focus of the police, did it work? Yeah, nah!!

It has to be said – for me, at least – that it’s time for some intelligent discussion about road safety and without the present moronic speed, speed and speed focus. There has to be some real thought and, perhaps, some

brave admissions that our system of driver and rider licencing is fundamentally flawed. We are producing incompetent drivers and riders for whom our decision makers have a simplistic view of “keeping the speeds down so that when they crash they don’t get so badly hurt”, how could anyone argue that increasing competence to reduce the number of “accidents” wouldn’t be a better policy?

Our driver and rider licencing and training is woefully inadequate, that’s why we are crashing and also why our ACC levies are as high as they are. We take a complete newbie rider, who’s never made a motorcycle move forward in his or her life, get them to learn a few circus tricks around a few cones in a carpark and if they can make not too bad a hash of it we declare them ready to go out on a public road and mix it with the traffic on a bike in the LAMS category

(up to 660cc). They go out there and start trying to figure out virtually every part of riding with no guidance, no coaching and no way to know if they are doing well or doing badly, except by getting hit by one of the thousands of pathetically unskilled drivers around them or simply by crashing all by themselves. Sure, many have someone to help them but the question has to be asked “how competent are these coaches themselves?” Then ACC, the doctors and nurses and probably 9 out of 10 people who hear about it say to themselves, “what the hell is wrong with these people, they must be mad trying to ride a motorcycle, dangerous things!”.

The drivers at least have some requirement to be trained a bit about driving in traffic, but with the numbers of foreign drivers and unlicensed drivers around

adding to the number of incompetent idiots, it is not a place to be on a motorcycle with no training.

It gets pretty bad when recently one of the people on a Driving Instructor training course was so poor a driver that the others on the course refused to get in the car with him, he then proved their case by being unable to drive a car out of the business garage without crashing it. How can we get to such a low point? This guy actually thought he could teach others to drive.

NZTA have at least made a start by bringing in CBTA motorcycle licence assessments but they missed a critical one of those letters, the "T", which stands for "training". No requirement has been put in place for training. That's absolutely hopeless!

Sure, we have a lot of older riders out there and there are initiatives being done to train them and make them safer. But it's a tough job and there will always be some who think they know everything there is to know. The way I see it is the "Apple Tree" concept, that we have an apple tree which has been neglected for 100 years and so we have a been producing a crop of "bad apples", it's really hard to make a bad apple good. It can be done, but it's hard work. It's much better to start feeding the tree and then we can start producing good apples right from the start.

Many of the developed countries around us, like the UK and Australia, have a much more robust motorcycle licencing system; so, we don't have to look far to see what other countries are doing to make their riders safe from day one.

To feed our tree and get a good crop we have to put professional training into our process, give our new riders the knowledge to ride better, be safer, be able to judge their mistakes against some solid knowledge and so learn from them. It's hopeless to set people up to blunder around making mistakes and not learning from them, hurting themselves, or worse, and adding to the statistics.

It's time we as motorcyclists made our voices heard and lobbied government to seriously look at the whole licencing training process, our ministers are on a three year term and are very cautious of making people unhappy. If they knew that motorcyclists understood the need to improve the licencing regime, by making it compulsory for our new riders to get some training before going out on the roads, and thereby be safer and better riders who don't add to our terrible statistics, they would probably be willing to "grow some" and do the right thing. It would also help if they could stop being so focussed on speed and shift the police focus onto unlicensed drivers and dangerous vehicles.

We all complain about the ACC levies, but the only way we will ever have them reduced is to reduce the gory statistics, we can do something about it.

Perhaps another ride on Parliament is in order, this time with a positive focus: "make our new riders safer by making them get some professional training during licencing.

This might surprise a lot of folk, the parliamentarians and a lot of the public, yes, motorcyclists are actually concerned about safety and want something positive done about it.

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