



SAFETY SKILLS BY DON GOMO

Our Rights, Our Support

As a community, bikers are generous, supportive, and helpful people. Be it a large-scale poker run to help a charity, or a local ride to support a specific individual, we're there in large

numbers, especially if the cause is for kids, veterans, or fellow riders. There's probably no larger group of people who do as much as motorcyclists. So then, why are we the first ones to step up to help other folks and causes, but fall flat when it comes to helping and protecting ourselves?

What I'm talking about is supporting motorcycle rights organizations that help protect us as riders. The last statistic I heard floating around for the approximate total of registered motorcycles in this country was 9 million.

Conversely, the approximate total number of riders who are members of either the American Motorcyclist Association (AMA), Motorcycle Riders Foundation (MRF) or State Motorcycle Rights Organizations (SMRO) is 750,000.

That's about 8 percent of the overall registered riders number. If you consider that there are probably plenty of folks who have more than one bike registered in their name, the overall percentage drops. Personally, I find it amazing that such a large number of motorcycle owners don't bother to support the organizations that are working to keep us safe. And many of these same folks probably do not care about what the government is trying to propose as to motorcycling legislation ... until it's too late. Then they're the first to scream about invasion of their rights.

Admittedly, many of us are unaware of what these organizations do to help us. Some think they are only about fighting to have the right to ride without a helmet, and some say that they wouldn't join a group like the AMA which states that "Loud Pipes Risk Rights." Believe me, these riders' rights groups are more than helmets and pipes. Have you ever thought that your state should do more to promote motorcycle awareness and safety? How about alerting bikers to road conditions or certain construction? And, contrary to belief, the AMA does fight against proposed legislation that unfairly targets motorcycle exhaust systems. If it wasn't for these motorcycle rights activists, things would be worse than they are now, with proposed laws and hidden attachments submitted by government officials who know nothing of our sport. Considering the small support these organizations currently have, I, as well as many others, feel they are doing a good job.

Since Rob Dingman has become its president, the AMA has

been concentrating more on motorcycle rights than ever before. It has pushed the Department of Transportation (DOT) to accelerate a long overdue study on motorcycle crashes, their causes, and possible prevention, as well as an analysis of information on the disproportionate number of motorcycle vs. automobile fatalities. With the government focusing on making helmet use mandatory nationwide, riders' rights groups presented the fact that helmet use may help reduce the climbing numbers, but the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has done little to gather the information needed for crash prevention, which is the core to our survival. Further delays in undertaking the study will cost more lives.

MRF Vice President Jeff Hennie told me that a good portion of his work includes making sure our elected officials allocate the proper funds for motorcycle safety, education, and awareness. While doing all that, the MRF continues to lobby for more money to help support our collective cycling needs. State groups do much the same thing on local levels. All the work of running around, making calls, and following up requires adequate funding. That's where membership fees apply, but, again, look at how many of us belong to one or more riders' rights groups. You can easily figure out that their respective budgets are extremely tight, so we are not getting the full benefits we need to protect ourselves.

The list is long as to what these groups are working on, and what they need to monitor to keep us safer. Granted, I, like some members, do not always agree with every position these organizations commit to, but the overall picture they represent is one I do agree with. Just like becoming an educated and skilled rider, the first step to make our sport safer starts with us. If the thought of better road conditions and enhanced riding safety sound like great ideas, then step up and help by becoming part of the defense as a riders' rights group member. Check out any of the aforementioned organizations to see which one fits your liking and get involved. We've helped many in our history of riding, and I know when the cry for help goes out, we'll be the first ones to rally. But now it's time to also think of ourselves, and do the right thing — work together toward safer motorcycling.

Keep it safe out there. **AIM**