

# Education, Helmets & You

IN MY JANUARY 2013 COLUMN, I DISCUSSED mandatory education for motorcyclists with some information and personal views. Since that article, there are now six states that require training for

a motorcycle endorsement of their license: Connecticut, Florida, Maine, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Texas.

While I might be a bit biased as a Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) RiderCoach and promoter of rider education, I have no objection to mandatory rider education for licensing. However, I believe the costs for such courses should be affordable to anyone interested in obtaining a motorcycle license. As much as motorcycle rights organizations have been telling the government and transportation groups that education is the correct direction to go instead of mandatory helmet laws, the American Motorcyclist Association (AMA) recently stated its stance against mandatory education in its August membership magazine, *American Motorcyclist*: "Despite the indisputable value of a properly structured rider education program, the AMA opposes legislation that would make such training mandatory for adults. Mandated rider education can substantially increase the expense of training and the delivery of training. It also has the potential to exacerbate the problems of unlicensed riders."

The AMA goes on to say that the training should be available, but voluntary and affordable, so the education can be used by all to decrease the risk of crashes. It seems that as soon as someone suggests something be mandatory or a law, organizations need to disagree with it, even if it can benefit them. While I may not fully agree with the AMA's position, I, too, believe that it should be available to all riders at minimal costs. Now if the government would agree on a process to educate, rather than mandate safety equipment, I think we would all gain from it. But that is not what things look like in the present day.

In issue #314's Protect Your Rights column, Jeff Hennie discussed the big push for a national mandatory helmet law and a typical hidden agenda of governmental officials, including the president.

Some may compare how mandatory seatbelt laws in most states have reduced the number of fatalities, but a motorcycle is a totally different vehicle. They don't think that way because they don't ride. There are other forces that drive their decisions, like the fact that motorcycle rider education can cost governments a lot of money but enforcement of helmet laws does not. In fact, it could generate funds for noncompliance.

I can recognize the fact that mandatory helmet laws could and probably would decrease the number of motorcycle fatalities, considering head injuries are the number one killer; however, I believe, like many others, that proper and affordable education for motorcyclists would have a much greater effect than just forcing riders to wear helmets.

The key is that the education process should not just be for motorcyclists, there should be a major motorcycle awareness campaign directed at the driving public. In issue #312, I discussed information that we can present to those we know who drive but don't ride. This information, as well as rider education aimed at the motorcycling masses, could significantly change the overall picture of motorcycles and accidents as we know it. We also have to consider those who are already licensed to operate a motorcycle: they, too, need to recognize the need to become more proficient, safe riders.

We, as riders, need to come together to express our opinions to the ones who make the laws that ultimately affect us. We should be doing what we can to push education, but along with that push, we should be taking the education route ourselves to prove that risks can be reduced through training more than laws requiring safety equipment. There are already venues for us to do this. Whether it's the AMA, Motorcycle Riders Foundation (MRF), state or local chapters of A Brotherhood Against Totalitarian Enactments (ABATE), or other area organizations, find one that you feel best describes how it protects your rights and not only join but get involved.

We can make a difference. Folks don't think that a national helmet law could become a fact, but it's getting closer each day we ride. So why not turn it around and into our favor and work to make the goal of education for both riders and drivers a reality? **AIM**



**... proper and affordable education for motorcyclists would have a much greater effect than just forcing riders to wear helmets**