

News For Thought

NCOM BIKER NEWSBYTES
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DOT Regulators To Crack Down On Novelty Helmets

U.S. transportation regulators on Wednesday, May 20 called for stronger rules for motorcycle helmets, proposing additional safety requirements in an effort to crack down on "novelty" helmets that do not meet federal standards. Department of Transportation officials say such uncertified helmets are unsafe and do not protect riders in crashes despite being sold and marketed for use on the road.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) proposes to amend Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard (FMVSS) No. 218 to modify the existing performance requirements of the standard by adding construction requirements. Its Proposed Rulemaking changes would further define what makes an acceptable motorcycle helmet, from its thickness to its compression ability, "in an attempt to help riders and state law enforcement officials identify inferior helmets." Such changes aim "to reduce fatalities and injuries resulting from traffic accidents involving use of motorcycle helmets" that fail to meet federal standards, DOT regulators told Reuters news agency, adding that rider deaths are disproportionately high due in part to the high number of motorcyclists wearing substandard helmets.

It is not clear why so many motorcycle riders use inferior helmets, said the regulators, but they say part of the problem seems to be that riders do not understand the risks. Novelty helmets can also be cheaper and appear "more comfortable or stylish," they added.

So-called "Novelty" helmets generally cover a smaller area of the head, have thin liners and are often sold with disclaimers stating that they are not for highway use "yet they are sold to highway users and used in great numbers by motorcyclists."

Tougher standards are expected to help authorities prosecute sellers of noncompliant helmets in states where helmets are mandatory, regulators said. The public can comment on the proposal for 60 days, up until July 20, 2015, before the department moves to issue its final regulation.

Motorcyclist Fatalities Drop For Second Straight Year

Riding a motorcycle in the U.S. is continuing to get a little safer. Based on a preliminary survey of 2014 fatality data, the Governors Highway Safety Association is predicting a second consecutive year-over-year drop in deaths for the first time on record since 1997.

The GHSA is predicting 4,584 motorcyclist deaths in 2014, a 1.8-percent drop. The organization bases its forecasts on motorcycle fatality data for January through September in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. From this raw info, deaths fell in 27 states in 2014, increased in 19 and remained the same in four, plus DC.

While good in the short term, the GHSA still thinks there's a lot to do to reduce rider deaths; 28% of fatal crashes in 2013 involved riders with a blood alcohol concentration above 0.08, 34% of those killed were speeding, and 25% didn't have a valid motorcycle license.

Of course the GHSA recommends that all states adopt universal helmet laws, noting that currently only 19 states and D.C. require all riders be helmeted.

The laws that govern vehicles like the Slingshot vary from state to state, and it's still not street legal in a few. That includes Connecticut, Hawaii and Maryland, while Indiana recently passed its own "autocycle" law authorizing its use.

In most states it follows the same helmet rules as a motorcycle, but in California can be driven without one and only requires an automobile license to operate.

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Motorcycle License Bill Passes In Alabama

Alabamians will need to have a motorcycle classification on their license, and take a written exam or safety course, under a bill that has passed the state Legislature and awaits the governor's signature. Alabama is the only state that doesn't require a specific motorcycle license,

and this measure "will make sure that those who are riding motorcycles are qualified and know enough about motorcycle safety," said the bill's sponsor State Rep. Phillip Pettus (R-Greenhill).

Pettus' House Bill 212 now goes to the governor for his signature. Currently, only motorcyclists age 14 and 15 have to take a written test and get the M classification. Those older than that may get the classification, but don't have to. Motorcyclists who already have the M classification will be grandfathered in.

Upon Governor Robert J. Bentley's approval, the new licensure law will become effective January 1, 2016, and law enforcement will then be able to issue tickets to motorcyclists who don't have the M classification. The bill also allows drivers to complete a safety course instead of the written test. There's a \$5 fee for the written test.

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Weird News: Cops Create Traffic Jam To Catch Bikers Splitting Lanes

New York police officers were recently caught on camera intentionally causing a traffic jam on the highway to catch motorcyclists splitting lanes through the stopped vehicles. The YouTube video has gone viral on the Internet, and was picked up by www.filmingscops.com, a conglomerative blogging service documenting police abuse otherwise ignored by traditional media outlets.

The narrator of the YouTube clip claims that the police actually shut down the entire highway for the sole purpose of catching bikers driving in between lanes. Several unsuspecting bikers can be seen in the video being pulled over as cops demand their license and registration, while the video shows the rest of the traffic on the highway at a complete stop for some time so that the cops can generate ticket revenues; "This appears to be one of the most epic parasitic wealth-extractions in recent memory."

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Texas Law Legalizes Slingshot Three-Wheeler
A new law now legalizes the three-wheel Polaris Slingshot in Texas. Polaris' Slingshot reverse-trike ended up in legal limbo last year after it was determined that it didn't fit the letter of any of Texas motor vehicle laws. It didn't have the safety equipment required to define it as a car, but since

it had seats, and not a saddle, it couldn't be considered a motorcycle, either. That changed last week when Governor Greg Abbot signed an amendment to the law that essentially removed the saddle requirement, allowing three-wheel "autocycles" to be registered as motorcycles, as they are in many states. A motorcycle license is still required to drive one, but you can take the test in a three-wheeler if you only plan to drive that type of vehicle.

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