



THE WAY I SEE IT *by Genevieve Schmitt*

A Snapshot Of Ourselves

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I'M SURE that at this point we've all heard of the closing of Big Dog Motorcycles. In an interesting juxtaposition, Big Dog's demise came just as first quarter (Q1) motorcycle sales results were being reported. For Q1 2011, sales rose 7.2

percent compared with the same period last year, according to the Motorcycle Industry Council's (MIC) Retail Sales Report. People are dipping their proverbial toes back in the water. Finally, good news! The segment seeing the biggest increase is scooters, up nearly 50 percent. Rising gas prices are pushing people to more economical modes of transportation.

One measure of rising interest in two-wheels is tire sales. Motorcycle and scooter tire sales increased 29.4 percent in the first quarter, according to the MIC's Quarterly US Motorcycle Tire Sales Report, which tracks nine major tire brands. Total on-highway tire sales rose 27.5 percent, while scooter tires jumped 48.6 percent. "Tire sales add to new-bike sales figures as a measure of motorcycle interest since there are still a lot of great used bikes putting on the miles, and older bikes that owners are reviving and enjoying once again," MIC President and CEO Tim Buche said.

With the good news that Americans are opening up their wallets to enjoy the wind in their faces, comes welcome news that motorcycle fatalities are down. While it seems like almost every week I hear of another motorcycle death somewhere in America, overall fatalities dropped 2 percent in 2010 according to preliminary data collected by the Governors Highway Safety Association. Buche says while this nice to hear, more gains can be made in motorcycle safety. "Industry surveys find that fewer than 50 percent of the riders on the road have taken formal

rider education. We continue to strongly urge governors and all policymakers to implement improved, expanded rider training programs for new, experienced, and returning riders."

Fewer than 50 percent! Are you kidding me? That's scary! I have a hard time swallowing that, but as I think back to the double-digit increases in motorcycles sales in the early to mid-2000s — with people buying motorcycles left and right, the chopper craze, the motorcycle TV shows fueling the fire, and the rise in motorcycle fatalities — I'm not surprised by this statistic about how many people are untrained. I'm sure a lot of new motorcycle buyers back then (and still today) figure they rode a motorcycle years ago as a kid or young adult, or grew up riding dirt bikes or four-wheelers so they can just hop on a new motorcycle and be a competent rider. I'm sure they can operate the clutch, throttle, and brake, and even turn enough to pass the driver's test, but that doesn't qualify for riding a motorcycle in my book.

Motorcycle rider education is underutilized, that's for sure. And the Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) knows that, so it's trying to do a better job at essentially marketing training to new riders. "We can go much further with motorcycle safety through effective countermeasures that are readily available," Buche said. "Legislators can raise the bar for what we accept as basic motorcycle skills and knowledge and increase focus on informed rider choices. Motorcyclists can choose to

make better decisions about their riding habits and what they wear, starting with a good helmet made to DOT standards. Car and truck drivers can look for motorcyclists and focus on driving without any distractions from a variety of things, starting with their cellphones and mobile devices."

MSF is doing its part promoting safety awareness to car drivers. Check out www.ForCarDrivers.com for helpful resources. And, in an effort to continue to find more effective ways to train motorcyclists for what can often be a battlefield on the highway, the new MSF Essential CORE curriculum offers advanced, hands-on exercises that can greatly improve rider skills and strategies. And furthermore, a groundbreaking study is currently underway that's collecting data on how to improve our riding. The MSF recently partnered with the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute on the innovative MSF 100 Motorcyclists Naturalistic Study. Video cameras and data acquisition sensors are being used to track 100 riders over several months to create a comprehensive picture of the many factors adding to both crashes and near-crashes. What is learned here will eventually be incorporated into rider education and safety messages.

As our nation rises from the ashes of this economic slump, hopefully the new crop of riders entering our sport will realize the importance of receiving formal training. It's a battlefield out there sometimes these days, and it's great news to see a reduction in fatalities. That's a number we can't bear to see increase anymore. **AIM**

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