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“Our mission is to reduce the number of motorcycle related fatalities and injuries in the State of West Virginia. To accomplish that mission we are striving to increase awareness of motorcycle safety through education and training programs.”

Harry Anderson’s recent statement about motorcycle safety programs in the State of West Virginia not only highlights the educational curricula that have been developed but also the partnerships between state and private organizations. As ATV/Motorcycle Program Coordinator for the West Virginia Department of Transportation, Division of Motor Vehicles, Mr. Anderson oversees the programming and partnerships dedicated to making motorcycle riding safer and more enjoyable.

One key public/private partnership has been forged between The West Virginia Motorcycle Safety Program (WVMSP) and the Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF), a non-profit vendor, that provides ongoing training, technical assistance, and required equipment and materials to training sites throughout the state. According to Mr. Anderson, “The partnership has reduced the cost of motorcycle training for the state and riders.”

The motorcycle training curriculum was written by the MSF which is recognized and valued for similar programs throughout the United States and all training sessions are conducted by staff that are certified by the organization. There are seven sites that offer the safety program: Glendale, Morgantown, Elkins, Parkersburg, South Charleston, Martinsburg, and Shady Spring.

According to Donnie Hale, West Virginia Motorcycle Safety Program (WVMSP) Training Coordinator, “At each of the seven sites we offer a 17 hour Basic Rider Course (BRC) for riders who are at least 16 years old. Depending on the amount of interest, each program is offered on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays from April through

October. Classroom instruction is delivered by ‘Rider Coaches’ who combine classroom teaching with hands-on riding skills instruction. We are also pleased with our motorcycle dealership partners that make available motorcycles for training purposes.”

Once riders complete both components of the course, they must pass written knowledge and skills tests to earn a certificate of completion. The course is a benefit to license applicants because the West Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles will waive the motorcycle skills test for those holding the BRC certification. An additional benefit of passing the course is that some insurance companies offer discounts for MSF certified riders.

Rick Kelley has worked with the West Virginia motorcycle program as a Rider Coach for the past seven years and believes it is vital to motorcycle safety. “It is a life saving course that is hard to assign a value because we are providing riders with a core foundation to build on as they continue to gain experience.”

Students must demonstrate proficiency on the BRC designed obstacle course and it is Mr. Kelley’s responsibility to provide the necessary instruction. According to Rick, “There are 17 exercises that students have to master by the end of the course including maneuvering in a limited space, controlled swerving, quick stopping, and cornering. The final evaluation is based on a number system that assigns points for rider errors.” The Rider Coach instruction has proven to be successful because very few students who complete the course fail to earn certification.

Halle Troup, a 17-year-old student from Keyser, expressed positive comments about her experience in the BRC hosted at Romney Cycles, a motorcycle dealership located at Industrial Park in Romney, WV. “This is my first time handling a bike on my own. The instructor and course are easy to follow and have taught me how to safely ride the bike. Mr. Kelley takes his time and makes sure that we are comfortable with everything before we ride. This is a great course.”

In addition to the BRC, more specialized classes are offered where instructors present effective mental strategies and riding skills that form a solid foundation for safe, enjoyable riding. For the younger and more adventurous riders, a one day Dirt Bike School teaches fundamental riding skills in an off road environment. Experienced motorcyclists are offered opportunities to enroll in a five hour Experienced Rider Course (ERC) that builds upon existing skills and knowledge. According to Chuck



John Leighty, Wayne Lockard, and Bobby Hite demonstrate motorcycle safety while enjoying a beautiful day.

Carpenter, ATV/Motorcycle Safety Program Coordinator, “participants are brought up-to-date on state and federal laws, advances in motorcycle technology, mental strategies, traction, risk management, braking, cornering and swerving techniques. The course helps experienced drivers to refresh their skills.”

Mr. Carpenter also notes that the demographics of motorcycle riding have changed over the years. “Many baby boomers have started riding. We also know that a large percentage of the new riders are women who no longer want to sit on the back of the bike. Women want to experience the freedom of motorcycle riding on their own.”

Another innovative program and partnership offered through the Motorcycle Safety Department is dubbed “Smartrainer” and features a simulator where the rider is seated on a motorcycle frame to experience maneuvering under a variety of conditions. As Donnie Hale explains, “The Smartrainer enables instructors to teach crash avoidance skills and other safety skills in a controlled environment. The Smartrainer is another example of our partnerships with the private sector. We were able to purchase eight of the units through Motorcycle Safety funds after Honda

Motor Company designed and built the unit while collaborating with MSF. Keyser High School in Mineral County currently has one of the Smartrainers and the instructor is working to develop a secondary school curriculum, so the students will meet the appropriate state requirements when taking the course. There are only a handful of states that have the Smartrainers.”

Delivering instructional programming to rural areas is a challenge that is also being met with the Mobile Training Unit, a classroom on wheels. In 2012, the mobile unit created a classroom environment for students in three locations, including Franklin and Romney. The self contained classroom enables instructors to provide a full range of programming and appears at special events around the state.

Another outreach program is “Cycle Talk,” a Saturday radio show aired on WCHS in Charleston, West Virginia. The show features Chuck Carpenter’s commentary on motorcycle safety and related contemporary information.

Motorcycle safety is not solely a state responsibility; riders must also be aware their own actions have consequences. Craig Schlottmann, a member of the American

Bikers Aimed Toward Education (ABATE) and president of the Fraternal Order of Eagles 2883 Riders, believes the state has an important role to play in motorcycle safety, particularly regarding enforcement of the helmet laws, addressing distracted drivers on cell phones, and promoting educational programs. “But riders can also help themselves. Some guys don’t wear approved helmets and that is a safety concern. Riders should also know their limits and not act aggressively.”

Donnie Hale believes riders can make themselves safer by following basic guidelines. “Some riders are wearing helmets without a lining; we call those ‘brain buckets.’ If

a rider can afford a \$40,000 motorcycle he can afford an approved helmet. We also stress wearing clothing that will reduce injuries in case of an accident. Clothing is an important safety factor because it increases the motorcyclists’ visibility. A bright orange, green, or light colored vest will make it easier for motorists to see the rider. Some riders think it isn’t cool to dress that way, but light colors protect riders.”

Motorcycle safety programs necessarily involve awareness information for motorists. “We are trying to get the message out to motorists. Increasing driver awareness has been one of our ongoing strategies in the State of West



Virginia. We often see accident reports where the driver of a car stated he didn't see the motorcycle," stated Mr. Carpenter.

The West Virginia Motorcycle Safety Program stresses that safety doesn't have to be viewed as boring; in fact, it is a matter of attitude and knowledge. By practicing safe habits, acquiring the necessary skills, and using common sense, motorcycle riding can be an enjoyable pastime and means of transportation.

For more information see www.transportation.wv.gov/msp/Pages/MSP/.aspx



Craig Schlottmann and friends ready for a ride. With pristine farm lands and majestic mountain terrain, riding in West Virginia and the surrounding area can be challenging as well as scenic.



Above: The Mobile Training Unit carries cycles for training and testing to various locations throughout the state.

Left photos: The motorcycle testing course is designed so riders have to perform a variety of actions, including riding clockwise and counter clockwise, in order to pass the test.

Far left photo: Motorcycle instructors help educate as well as test new riders.

