

# A Profile of the Federation of European Motorcyclists

prepared for Motorcycle Noise Demonstration, European Parliament, Brussels  
Tuesday 21st March 1995

*by Simon MilwardBackground*

In June 1988, following the first motorcyclists' Euro Demo in Strasbourg, national riders' rights organisations from France, Germany, UK, Austria, Greece, and Italy recognised the need for effective representation for motorcyclists within the European legislative process and agreed to form the Federation of European Motorcyclists.

Unlike the vast majority of Brussels-based lobbying organisations, the FEM does not represent corporate interests. The interests of motorcyclists as users or consumers are the people who the FEM speak for. Motorcyclists are by definition individualists and only join organisations to protect their freedoms, so the FEM can rightly claim to be a citizens' organisation committed to the maintenance of the right of the individual to enjoy a particular lifestyle.

Affiliated to the FEM today are 19 national riders' rights organisations and 36 national specialist and one-make clubs from 16 European countries. The Brussels-based Secretariat, headed by General Secretary Simon Milward, coordinates policies and undertakes lobbying in line with the decisions of the FEM Executive Committee, which meets three times a year and on which representatives from all affiliates in all European countries participate.

## Aims and Methods

FEM's aim is to promote the interests of road riders by cultivating and sustaining relationships with those in power, and assisting them in the framing of acceptable road transport legislation.

Our experience in negotiating with politicians is that ignorance of the facts rather than genuine antipathy towards motorcycling is one of the main reasons for the unsympathetic legislation. There are people in Brussels with strong anti-motorcycle feelings, but they are substantially outnumbered by moderates who only need to be kept informed

in order that sensible decisions are made. To this end, FEM has gained consultation status with the European Commission, which drafts new laws.

Through the FEM Secretariat in Brussels, the lobbying efforts of the national organisations are coordinated, and a coherent motorcyclists' voice is presented to the European Parliament and Commission. FEM is able to keep track of developments, and issues specific guidance to the national organisations.

Whilst motorcycle industry and sporting interests are represented in Europe, we believe it is essential that the specific interests of the road-riding motorcyclist are properly catered for. FEM is the only riders' organisation with a permanent presence in Brussels, concentrating its efforts on motorcycle and rider-related matters. We maintain a strict policy of political neutrality.

FEM is a member of the US-based International Coalition of Motorcyclists and in regular contact with riders' organisations from New Zealand, Australia and Canada. We cooperate and coordinate activities with the FIM, sharing, as we do, a number of common affiliates. FEM places high priority on the exchange of information on a worldwide basis.

## Achievements of FEM:

- established a full-time riders' rights office at the centre of the EC legislating process in Brussels;
- is well-known by Members of the European Parliament who praise the motorcycle lobby for its commitment and professionalism;
- helped modify a complicated and expensive three stage motorcycle driving licence proposal in 1990;
- in 1992 secured exemptions from EC type approval for one-off producers and for new

parts for existing machines, and preserved the freedom to modify one's own machine after point of sale;

- delayed the introduction of new EC noise limits by staging a well-publicised noise demonstration in Brussels on 5 September 1992, in front of representatives of the Commission and 12,000 motorcyclists;
- lead the opposition that defeated the plans to impose a blanket ban on new motorcycles over 100 bhp limit in 1993;
- has compiled a list of lawyers from different European countries who give free first advice to travelling motorcyclists who need legal help;
- has united 55 national motorcyclists' organisations from 16 European countries in the fight against legislative threats to motorcycling.

## Policies

Our policies on different European Union matters are determined by the FEM committee. FEM primarily exists for coordination rather than policy-making, although below you will find the general views of FEM as a whole, as established between member organisations.

**Power limits** - FEM opposes proposals to limit the power of new motorcycles. There is no road safety evidence to support this proposal, and the European Parliament itself rejected the idea of a limit for this reason. The limit discriminates against motorcyclists as there is no proposed limit for cars. FEM believes the limit to be an unnecessary interference in the lives of individuals.

**Noise limits** - FEM opposes the introduction of ever lower motorcycle noise limits. They threaten production of traditional air-cooled engines and will result in complete engine enclosure for all machines and substantial price rises.

FEM appreciates the necessity of sensible noise limits, but insists that those set as Stage 1 of Directive 87/56 EEC are more than adequate. Enforcement of these limits will deal with any existing noise problem: introduction of lower limits for new bikes will be counter-productive.

FEM considers the establishment of a safe minimum noise level to be desirable in the interests of road safety.

**Anti-tampering** - FEM regards this proposal as insupportable for anything larger than 50cc mopeds. There is no justification at all for banning the favourite past-time of many individuals, that of modifying your own machine in the way you want. It reverses a previous decision of the European Parliament that allowed modifications. It will drastically increase the price of motorcycling.

**Leg protectors** - FEM is opposed to the introduction of leg protectors. Research has shown they are inherently dangerous and lead to increased injuries to other parts of the body. FEM fears a European standard will turn into a compulsory requirement.

**Safety** - FEM believes that the most effective way to reduce the motorcycle accident rate is by good quality training and promotion of defensive riding techniques to new motorcyclists at an early stage. This must be allied to motorcycle awareness campaigns directed at other road users, who cause most motorcycle accidents. FEM is opposed to the principle of stepped licensing, because no evidence exists to prove its worth.

Generally FEM believes that the use of "safety" aides, especially where no evidence exists to prove their worth as in the case of conspicuous clothing and daytime headlights, should be left up to the choice of individuals. FEM agrees that rules and regulations must be balanced against individual and civil rights.

FEM recognises the existence of "risk compensation," whereby road users may drive or ride up to their own personally acceptable level of risk. This brings into question the benefits of many types of "safety" equipment.

**Environmental** - FEM considers that legislators should adopt a policy of promoting motorcycle use in order to reduce energy consumption along with congestion and pollution.

## Funding

Funding is provided mainly by the national organisations, who pay 1 ecu per member of their own organisation to FEM and by national specialist and one-make clubs who pay between 50 and 1000 ecu depending on their size. In 1994 a sponsorship scheme resulted in donations of 25,000 ecu being received from industry. It is hoped that the response will be even greater to the 1995 appeal and that further support will come from the ACEM the manufacturers' association and the European Commission to enable a project on motorcycle training arrangements to be undertaken.

Presently the FEM employs two full-time members of staff at modest salaries. Our ability to combat unfair EC laws depends directly on the funds available to us. More staff will cost more money, as will investment in the necessary equipment to enable the FEM to function effectively.