

Local to Global; Our Government Relations Future

by Ed Youngblood; President, American Motorcyclist Association

The following White Paper is based on presentations made by Mr. Youngblood to the Honda Sport Touring Riders Association national rally in August, 1997; and to the annual meeting of ABATE of Ohio in January, 1998. Submitted by Angela M. Myers Assistant to the President, July 1, 1998

The motorcyclists' rights movement in America began during the latter years of the 1960s, among both road riding and off-highway riding motorcycle enthusiasts. Due to environmental and safety initiatives by government agencies, motorcyclists began to perceive that their traditional rights were being taken away. Although these initiatives were emanating from the federal government, most riders perceived that their privileges were being attacked at the state and local level, either through restrictions on local riding areas or new mandatory helmet and licensing laws coming out of state legislatures. Thus, their reaction was primarily local, either through expressing rage toward the local forest ranger or initiating public demonstrations against helmet laws on the local court house lawn. The approach was passionate, but unsophisticated; and largely misdirected toward levels of government that were not responsible and that were not able to provide solutions. We had not yet realized that while change affects us where we live, frequently its cause is remote, hidden, or several steps removed.

Over the past thirty years we have had to learn that dealing with government is a complex and sophisticated process, involving carefully crafted strategy and tactics at several levels and in several branches of government, sometimes simultaneously. It has been necessary for us to learn the "technology" of government relations. We've had to comprehend the differences between the styles and roles of the legislative and executive branches of government, sometimes playing one against the other. We've had to accept that with some people politics can be more important than principle, and as a result we've formed political action committees to gain access to candidates. We've had to learn that one organization cannot — and probably should not — do it all; that our

best approach is teamwork among various organizations coordinating their efforts at the local, state, and national levels of government. We've had to immerse ourselves in subjects we didn't want to understand, and learn technology we never wanted to know. It has been — all told — a long, complex, tedious, frustrating, aggravating, confusing, but ultimately exciting and gratifying work in progress; a lesson in what happens when adults who care about their rights, dignity, and quality of life decide to see if their schooldays civics lessons really work.

We can look back over these three decades with a certain amount of pride. We've learned our lessons well, we've become sophisticated to the extent that other players in the government relations game sometimes express admiration toward "the bikers," and we've slain dragons that once seemed invincible. But we dare not slide from pride toward complacency. The main lesson we should have learned is that the only constant is change and that we'll never cease to be confronted by new challenges to our chosen mode of personal transportation and recreation.

That the challenges will continue is suggested by significant trends that will affect us not just locally and nationally, but on a global scale. These trends, both in product design and regulatory process, often arise beyond the territorial boundaries of the United States since the design parameters for future products and transportation systems are being created for global markets. Motorcycling — both the product and the activity — will change radically over the next decade. We will see threats and opportunities like we've not seen in the past, and we need to be ready. These changes will be driven by two important concepts. The first concept is technical and is called ITS, or Intelligent Transportation Systems. The second is economic and political and is called Global Harmonization.

ITS is the development of electronic technology to reduce congestion, improve mobility, and increase safety. Its purpose is to enhance, reduce, or even eliminate whenever possible the human factor in decision making by vehicle operators. Vehicle manufacturers are already marketing automated collision warning systems and global satellite positioning.

Connected closely to ITS is AHS, the Automated Highway System. Relax, read a book, watch TV, surf the net. What the heck! Maybe even have sex. But sit back and let the highway do the driving. This is not a scenario out of science fiction. It was tested in August, 1997, on a section of I-15 north of San Diego. And the same week that the Automated Highway System was demonstrated in San Diego, the U.S. Department of Transportation held a forum to launch the Intelligent Vehicle Initiative, or IVI. The highest priority of the IVI program is to improve highway safety. This is to be accomplished by facilitating and accelerating availability of in-vehicle systems that would provide driving assistance, control intervention, and motorist information. In contrast to the Automated Highway System which may not see actual development for fifteen to twenty years, the goal of IVI is to have many of these in-vehicle technologies in the traffic mix within five years.

This whole concept of transportation and safety is contrary to the reason we ride motorcycles. We derive our joy from a relationship with the vehicle, by making decisions and managing risk based on the sensory input we receive from motorcycles and the highway. It is no coincidence that the research organizations and government agencies responsible for these developments are paying little or no attention to motorcycles in the future traffic mix. It is clear that some visionaries just don't see a place for motorcycling in our future.

This is a trend that we can't simply oppose or refuse to deal with. Saying "hell no, we won't go!" is not a viable option. Think about how quickly electronic technology has revolutionized the home and the workplace over the last decade, most of which we probably consider a good thing. We are going to see the same rapid advancements

in electronic technology in vehicle design and transportation over the next decade. As motorcyclists we are going to have to find ways to fit in, rather than be swept away. There will be good changes in the process, and we need to look for them. But we can be certain that motorcycling as we know it is going to change. I would suggest that our mission is not to protect and perpetuate the vehicle as we know it today. That will be a rear-guard, losing battle. Rather, our mission should be to find ways to keep the joy in motorcycling as these inevitable changes take place.

In addition to technological changes, our world is moving rapidly toward a global economy and multinational political structures. This also has begun to affect motorcycling. To understand what is happening we need to observe what has taken place with the emergence of the European Union. The whole idea behind creating a united Europe was to create a more efficient, profitable trading bloc. To achieve this the leading governments of Europe had to agree to an idea called "harmonization," which is the setting of product design standards to create consistency throughout many countries. By subjecting fifteen nations to the process of international harmonization, the EU has created a single market with over 460 million customers. It has worked so well that North America is no longer the number one market for many products, including motorcycles, and as the manufacturers focus more closely on Europe — their number one market -- they will build their products to European Union specifications.

In fact, industry so appreciates economy of scale, it is only logical that major corporations and governments are looking for opportunities to develop systems and standards for global harmonization. Whether it's a toaster, a television, or a motorcycle, we are moving toward world market products. With these standardized products come standardized ideas about how they should be properly used. The ideas to protect you and me from ourselves no longer simply come out of Washington. By the time an idea surfaces in our nation's capitol, it has probably already been carefully discussed and coordinated with bureaucrats in Brussels.

This has resulted in what we consider some

scary trends in motorcycle development and design; one being the great leg protector controversy. The idea of leg protectors originated in Europe and is still being driven, along with the idea of motorcycle air bags, by European researchers and regulators. By the turn of the millennium the European Union will have type-approval standards in place that will affect every future motorcycle we buy, and that includes motorcycles made in America. If we wait to fight these battles only after they begin to appear in the American market, it will be too late. So how do we cope with this brave new world? We've got to do what we've always done, which is aggressively learn. In addition to mastering the technology, we, as freedom fighters, have got to go through our own process of unity and global harmonization. In other words, we have to create dialogue and effective partnerships at every level of the motorcyclists rights movement, from local to global.

The American Motorcyclist Association has already embarked on a program to confront these challenges. The AMA has sent staff to the World Congress on Intelligent Transportation Systems in order to become informed on the state of the technology. It has met with the Joint Program Office on ITS of the Federal Highway Administration. It has become a member of ITS America, an advisory committee created to advise government on the emerging technology. Through these contacts we are trying to make sure that motorcycles are in the picture and provided for.

The AMA has upped its government relations commitment at every level. It has added staff and created training programs to try to get more motorcyclists involved in government relations activism at the community and state levels. It has increased its staff in Washington to better deal with issues at the national level. And it has taken its message of activism and partnership to international motorcycling organizations.

In this regard we learned we were not able to simply establish a partnership in Europe; but actually had to help create the partner. This was undertaken through support of a conference in Luxembourg during April, 1997. Prior to that conference, national level European organizations were divided into two rival groups. Through the

International Motorcycle Federation we obtained the funding for a conference, which was chaired by AMA Government Relations Vice President Rob Rasor. Both the AMA and the Motorcycle Riders Foundation were conspicuous participants at that conference. It was not unlike the historic Meeting of the Minds that took place in America over a decade ago. Fortunately, we got the results we needed when, on January 1, 1998, the Federation of European Motorcyclist Associations (FEMA) became a reality. As a result of the Luxembourg conference, the two European motorcyclists rights groups have merged to form an effective European partner that we can work with to confront some of our problems even before they arrive on our shores.

The message we all need to understand is that no entity in this chain of freedom fighting partnerships — from local to global — is more important than another. The AMA's partnership with SMROs is as important as its partnership with the MRF. Its partnership with MRF is as important as its partnership with FEMA and the FIM. It is a chain of cooperation and activism where every link is important and necessary.

It would be wonderful if we could believe that motorcycling beyond 2001 will be just like it is today. It would be comforting to believe that we are going to solve our problems the same way we always have, strictly on the domestic level. Unfortunately, it won't be that simple, because change is the only constant, and we are going to confront challenges like we've not seen before. But we can take comfort in realizing that we have never shrunk from a challenge? If we did, we probably wouldn't be motorcyclists.

As we face these government relations challenges — from local to global — our mission will not be to protect the past and defend the status quo. Motorcycles have changed over the decades, and they are going to continue to change. What we ride tomorrow may not look like what we're riding today. That's not important. What is important is that the motorcycle must continue to deliver the special pleasure that it has always provided. Our mission, as we move into the next millennium, will be the same as it's always been, which is to find ways to keep the joy in motorcy-

cling. The key difference will be that our sphere of operation will, by necessity, include government relations activity at the local level, at the global level, and everywhere in between.