Inappropriately Cultivated Overconfidence Leads to an Increase in Fatality and Morbidity Rates for Motorcyclists

By Joseph T. Elliott, Executive Director
National Motorcycle Training Institute

The widespread acceptance and popularity of the Motorcycle Industry Council's (MIC) sponsored MSF motorcycle licensing program has led to large increases in fatality and morbidity rates for motorcyclists. This is demonstrated by three facts:

- Nationally, the fatality and morbidity rates for motorcyclists increased by 110% while the number of registered motorcycles only increased by 84% over the last ten years[1].

- The percentage of licensed motorcyclists in fatal collisions in California increased from 42% when a licensed rider had to pass a skills test at the DMV to well over 60% with the wide use of the MIC sponsored training to waive the DMV skills test for licensing[2].

- The Navy/Marine Corps fatality rate doubled from 2 per month before the widespread implementation of MIC sponsored training on bases to 4 per month after the wide implementation of MIC sponsored training on bases[3].

A mechanism that increases these rates is the deliberate cultivation of overconfidence in beginner motorcyclists inherent in MIC's MSF licensing program. The beginner motorcyclists are **unable** to detect that they demonstrated only beginner skill, and not advanced skill as they are told. This is a mechanism for causing the increase in risk for the MIC sponsored graduate as they enter their learners' time on the street. The following two examples illustrate how the beginner motorcyclists are fooled into feeling they are at a high skill level when the reality is that they may be at the most basic and rudimentary skill level after completing the MIC sponsored licensing program.

1. <u>The Beginner Skill of Straight Line Stability is inappropriately considered as "Surmounting Obstacles":</u>

The MIC's MSF licensing procedure involves a popular exercise that claims to involve surmounting obstacles. However, there is no realistic obstacle involved and the students are lulled into believing they are sufficiently skilled to surmount obstacles. The students ***feel*** they have done something ***advanced*** when in fact they have only demonstrated the skill of riding in a straight line with stability. A brief description of this part of the exercise as described to beginner students is: approach a wooden 2X4 at 90 degrees, grasp both handgrips, rise off the seat, accelerate just prior to impact, at front tire contact, roll off the throttle.

Although this sounds like an advanced skill, the reality is that the board used as the "obstacle" is only 1.5 inches tall. Every experienced rider knows that this is not an obstacle. Common surfaces ridden by motorcyclists have many, many uneven surfaces larger than 1.5 inches. These many and varied uneven surfaces are found at every

intersection, entrance areas, and exit areas. Also, there are many uneven surfaces throughout common road.

The reason why beginner motorcyclists are not challenged by small uneven surfaces is due to the rudimentary skill they possess of straight-line riding stability. This is the most rudimentary skill. One cannot ride any motorcycle even briefly if one cannot ride in a stable straight line. For example in the "surmounting obstacles" exercise as conducted in the flat riding area, riding over a 1.5 inch discontinuity at 90 degrees to the path of travel, could be easily done by motorcyclist with no hands on the handle bar and eyes closed!

All motorcyclist ride over uneven surfaces many times on every ride. Examples of uneven surfaces greater than 1.5 inches are driveway entrances, speed bumps, cracks and potholes in road surfaces. Almost every intersection has some unevenness where the two roads are joined. In no way can riding over a 1.5 inch board at low speed can be considered *advanced preparation* for street riding.

There is no evidence that uneven surfaces of 1.5 inches approached at 90 degrees are causal factors in mishaps. This agrees with the theory that straight-line riding stability is a rudimentary skill. Of course presenting rudimentary skills as intermediate or advanced skills should be discouraged by safety experts. In preparation for real street riding, examples of intermediate skills training for handling uneven surfaces are exercises of cornering or hard braking over different uneven surfaces.

Beginner riders who have completed the simple exercise of riding straight over a 1.5 inch uneven surface come away with the *experience* that they have an advanced skill of "Surmounting Obstacles". This misinformation and mindset puts beginner riders at a disadvantage managing the risks of riding motorcycles, resulting in increased fatality and morbidity rates for motorcyclists.

2. <u>Requiring only Rudimentary and Beginner Skills to Receive an Unrestricted Street Riding</u> <u>Motorcycle License While Making the Student Feel Like it is an Advanced Skill Test.</u>

Before the 1990s, some states with licensing skills tests required demonstration of one or more **intermediate** physical skills prior to receiving the unrestricted motorcycle endorsement. Also implicit in the licensing procedure was the candidate having a learner's permit, learner's time and gaining some street riding experience prior to obtaining the unrestricted license. These types of endorsements effectively gave a simple method for determining whether a rider has intermediate skill or rudimentary skills. The simple question in these states was, "do you have a motorcycle license?" In the past, the answer being yes could be interpreted as the licensed rider was more skillful and knowledgeable than the unlicensed rider. This is no longer the case.

Changing the skill test to an easier skill test will not necessarily increase the motorcyclist's fatality and morbidity rates. What contributes to the current increase in rates was the method of the change. Included throughout the easier MIC sponsored

license program is a process to cultivate the candidate's *experience* and *feeling* that they had performed at an intermediate skill level. This can and does lead to increased fatality and morbidity rates for motorcyclists.

The current MIC's MSF licensing program, and what now can be considered the national motorcycle licensing process, only requires rudimentary skills to pass. Participants who pass at the lower skill level cannot know that they performed so much lower than their peers riding with intermediate skills (even participating in the same class) had performed.

In the MIC's MSF license test there are four skill demonstrations with passing criteria that the combined penalty point total be less than 21 points. The swerve, quick stop, and cornering skills are all beginner skills and each have the maximum penalty points of 15. The only intermediate skill evaluated, a tight U-turn, has a maximum penalty of only 8 points instead of 15 points like the others. This point bias assures that only beginner skill will be needed to pass the test.

The participants are set up to "experience" all four evaluations as intermediate skills, and are <u>not</u> told that the only skill they are demonstrating that can be considered intermediate has a less stringent scoring criteria. This will cause the participants to have overconfidence in their motorcycling abilities.

The purposely cultivated and instilled overconfidence is easy to measure by tracking what type of motorcycles these overconfident first time riders purchase even though they may have never ridden on the street before the purchase. For example, these recent graduates with no street riding experience *feel* it is ok for them to purchase a Suzuki Hayabusa motorcycle, the most powerful production motorcycle made, and can quickly attain speeds of 180 mph! Or, they are willing to purchase as their first motorcycle a Harley-Davidson Electra Glide full dresser, a powerful motorcycle that weighs over 750 lbs. unloaded! This is like having someone attempt to ride a championship contending thoroughbred racehorse after learning the beginner skills of riding a tame pony!

The following suggestion will help you understand how the current test increases the morbidity rates. Design a new skills test exclusively constructed from the four current skill evaluations, however the evaluations will be purposefully separated. We will additionally add some appropriate directions targeting the beginner riders in the test group. We encourage the MIC to design a new skills test which includes the following four suggestions:

1. Run the tight U-turn evaluation first. Separate the riders who can complete the U-turn evaluation without penalty points from the other classmates.
2 Graduate and dismiss the separated riders since it is known that the riders who completed the U-turns without penalty points always have few to no penalty points on the three beginner skill evaluations.
3 Explain to the remainder of the class that they will now be evaluated on just beginner skills and that there is near a 100% pass rate for these evaluations.

4 Graduate and dismiss the second group on completion with the caveat that although they have an equivalent unrestricted license they should be cautious as they complete their learner's time because they have beginner skills only.

It is reasonable to conclude that the above steps will reduce the false sense of high skill graduates "experience" even though they had not even attained an intermediate skill level. This *new* test would slightly diminish the overconfidence that the current testing system purposefully cultivates resulting in a more realistic evaluation of one's skill level.

There are many more examples in the widely accepted MIC sponsored training that contribute to the increase in the fatality and morbidity rates for motorcyclists, such as product placement in the class videos of inappropriate riding gear and motorcycles for first time riders. We are sure the two examples illustrated above are useful representations of the problem. Our hope is that by illuminating these easy to understand activities that increase these rates, readers can begin to recognize ways to reverse this trend of increased fatality and morbidity rates.

References:

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