



Victorian Scooter Riders Association

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HITTING THE WRONG TARGET!

(unforeseen consequences of well intended road safety campaigns)

Foreword

- 1) Motorcycle and Scooter Vulnerability 1**
- 2) The “Law of the Jungle”**
- 3) The New Road “Menace”**
- 4) Negative stereotypes, perceptions and attitudes towards Riders 2**
- 5) Road Safety Campaigns**
- 6) Unintentional consequences**
- 7) The Reality of Motorcycles and Scooters**
- 8) A call for a new approach 3**
- 9) Parliamentary Inquiry Recommendations**
- 10) Shared Responsibility**
- 11) Motorcycles, the answer to the World's urban traffic congestion! 4**
- 12) A Last Word**

Foreword

The Victorian Scooter Riders Association (VSRA) is comprised of the four largest Scooter Clubs in Victoria; it is one of the most significant organisations representing the interests of Victorian Motorcycle and Scooter Riders, currently representing over 800 Scooter Riders. The VSRA was formed to be the voice of Scooter Riders and Clubs, this in preference to unsolicited representation being provided by those having a vested interest in Scootering as an “Industry” and also on the understanding that issues relative to Scooter Riders although similar to, can in many cases be different to those relevant to Motorcycle Riders and the Organisations representing them.

The VSRA desires to see the implementation of the recommendations resulting from the recent Parliamentary Inquiry into Motorcycle Safety (PIMS), which encourages a consultation process for Motorcycle safety involving all road safety agencies, including Motorcycle & Scooter Clubs, Stakeholders, Groups and Members of the broader community. The VSRA with in depth knowledge and experience relating to Scooter Riders and Clubs is available as a valuable resource to all agencies involved in improving Road Safety.

The VSRA appreciates the concept of Road Safety as a shared responsibility and how this can only be achieved with consultation and input from a broad range of road users. This report considers road safety advertising campaigns and how they may be seen as **hitting the wrong target** and also contributing to the negative perceptions, stereotypes and attitudes that Drivers have towards Motorcycle and Scooter Riders. This is one of many reports to be prepared by the VSRA to assist road safety agencies and other interested organisations to appreciate issues relevant to Motor Scooter Riders. It is hoped the insights provided may allow those responsible for road safety to appreciate in greater depth the issues relevant to Riders as highly vulnerable road users.

1) Motorcycle and Scooter Vulnerability

Riding a Motorcycle or a Scooter in Victoria is dangerous, not just because of the obvious, in that a two wheeled vehicle provides far less protection than does a car and that Riders are therefore far more vulnerable, but also because many Drivers on Victorian Roads use this vulnerability to intimidate and endanger Riders. Many Drivers are not perturbed that due to the vulnerability of a Motorcycle or Scooter, it will be the Rider that comes off worse should there be a collision. Drivers know that even if they are 100% to blame for a collision when a Motorcycle or Scooter is involved, the Driver is far less likely to be hurt. Therefore many Drivers take unnecessary risks with Motorcycles, evidently believing Riders should “know their place” and that the Rider being at greater risk, must take sole responsibility and all the necessary steps to avoid a collision or accident.

It may be said that due to the negative stereotypes and attitudes held by Drivers towards Riders, along with the obvious Rider vulnerability, Drivers in Victoria have come to expect the Rider must always give way, no matter who legally may have the right of passage. It is unfortunate that on Victorian Roads many Drivers have adopted a predatory “Law of the Jungle” attitude, believing the biggest vehicle need not give way to a more vulnerable one. Without doubt this attitude contributes to a road network that is far less safe for Riders than it could and should be.

2) The “Law of the Jungle”

Riders may reasonably expect that in a civilised Country like Australia, steps will be taken to ensure not only Riders, but all Road users obey the road rules and that anyone illegally endangering the lives of other Road Users will be prevented from doing so. In this regard it is fair to expect that the “Law of the Jungle” mentality should not be allowed to prevail on Victorian Roads. Unfortunately the opposite appears to be the case, as “Law of the Jungle” attitudes become increasingly prevalent. How and why has this occurred? Why is it many Drivers believe Riders are not legitimate road users? Why do Drivers believe Riders do not have the same rights as they do? Why is there a prevailing belief by Drivers, that Riders due to their own vulnerability must always give way to the Driver?

There may be more than one reason as to why the “Law of the Jungle” culture is prevalent on Victorian Roads, but without doubt a major contributor is the perception that Riders and not Drivers are always to blame for any accident involving both a Car and a Motorcycle. In this regard the “Law of the Jungle” mentality has been perpetuated by the negative stereotypes, perceptions and attitudes that Drivers have towards Riders, in that the Rider is always wrong! It therefore needs to be asked, by whom, when, where and how have these negative stereotypes been generated.

3) The New Road “Menace”

It is perhaps not surprising that these negative stereotypes and perceptions have resulted in one third of all Drivers having the attitude that Scooter Riders are a Menace on the Road; this belief is supported by research conducted in 2007 by the automotive Insurance Company AAMI², which delivered the following conclusions:

- i) Drivers nationally said Motor Scooters are the new menace on Australia’s capital City roads.*
- ii) Many Drivers are annoyed with the increased presence of Motor Scooters on major city roads with one third calling them the new “Menace”.*

An unwarranted justification for the “Law of the Jungle” has developed around this attitude that Scooter Riders are the new “Menace” and so have no legitimacy and deserve little respect. The Driver attitude is increasingly one that Riders need to keep out of their way and take sole responsibility for avoiding an accident. The concept that Road Safety is a shared responsibility appears to be not of concern to Drivers when the other vehicle is a Motorcycle or Scooter. This attitude is why that on a daily basis Scooter Riders face 33% of Drivers who believe Riders are a “menace” and behave irresponsibly towards them. This negative Driver attitude sees Motorcycles and Scooters more increasingly vulnerable and as “Targets” for Drivers on Victorian Roads.

4) Negative stereotypes, perceptions and attitudes towards Riders

One recommendation of the recent Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Motorcycle Safety is the TAC focus its Motorcycle safety advertising to redress the attitude that responsibility for Rider safety is solely attributable to the Rider and that campaigns dealing with Motorcycles raise awareness, in preference to creating negative stereotypes, perceptions and attitudes towards Riders by Drivers.

5) Road Safety Campaigns

The Victorian Transport Accident Commission (TAC) promotes road safety and in this regard is responsible for the vast majority of road safety advertising in Victoria. It is generally accepted much of this advertising and associated TAC road safety initiatives have been highly effective, so much so they have been sold to and adopted in Countries overseas. However; sometimes there are unforeseen consequences of such advertising campaigns; in that they also are prone to greatly influencing those outside of the intended target market.

It is the opinion of the VSRA that TAC road safety campaigns such as “38 Times” and “The Ride”, may contribute to negative stereotypes, perceptions and attitudes of Riders. The attitude amongst Drivers that Riders are a “Menace” will not diminish whilst such campaigns are used. Another concern of the VSRA is how sometimes the legitimacy of the TAC campaigns is questionable, not only as they may contribute to negative stereotypes, perceptions and attitudes towards Riders, but also as questionable data is used. For example; the “38” times figure has been referred to by Professor Mark Stevenson of the Monash University Accident Research Centre as “inaccurate”³.

6) Unintentional Consequences

It may be said the first rule of marketing is “know thy audience”; it’s fair to presume the target audience of the “38 Times” and “The Ride” TAC road safety campaigns is not every Motorcycle or Scooter Rider, but irresponsible ones. Unfortunately the campaigns are also seen by Drivers and perhaps an unintentional consequence has been a contribution to the undesirable stereotypes and perceptions of Riders as held by Drivers.

Admittedly it is difficult to quantify if campaigns directed at irresponsible Riders encourages a change in attitude and results in responsible riding to any greater extent than they create negative stereotypes and perceptions of Riders. What has however been quantified by empirical evidence and research is how 33% of Drivers believe Scooter Riders are a “Menace”.

It may be unfair to suggest such negative stereotypes, perceptions and attitudes have been intentionally created, or to suggest that the TAC or VicRoads do not have the desire to see a reduction in accidents and fatalities. It also should be said that without past road safety initiatives introduced by the TAC and VicRoads, there can be little doubt Victorian Roads would be far more dangerous than they are today. However; the unintentional consequences of road safety campaigns such as “38 Times” and “The Ride” need be considered, in regard to how although prepared to shock a small number of irresponsible Riders, they influence the negative perceptions and stereotypes held by Drivers towards Riders and so further contribute to the “Law of the Jungle” mentality prevalent on Victorian Roads.

7) The Reality of Motorcycles and Scooters

Motorcycle and Scooter Riders are viewed as the new “Menace” on the Road and are demonised in many road safety campaigns; yet during the last decade much improvement to road safety has been achieved for and by Motorcycle and Scooter Riders.

In 2012 this improvement continued with a 16% reduction in fatalities of Riders on Victorian Roads, but by stark comparison fatalities for Drivers increased by 20%. It’s no wonder that with evidence showing a long term trend of continuous improvement in motorcycle fatalities that Riders ask the question:

“why are Motorcycle and Scooter Riders forced to pay a safety levy, but Drivers are not?”

On this basis the recommendation resulting from the recent Parliamentary Inquiry into Motorcycle Safety that the “Safety Levy” be abolished appears highly appropriate and necessary to eliminate discrimination against Riders.

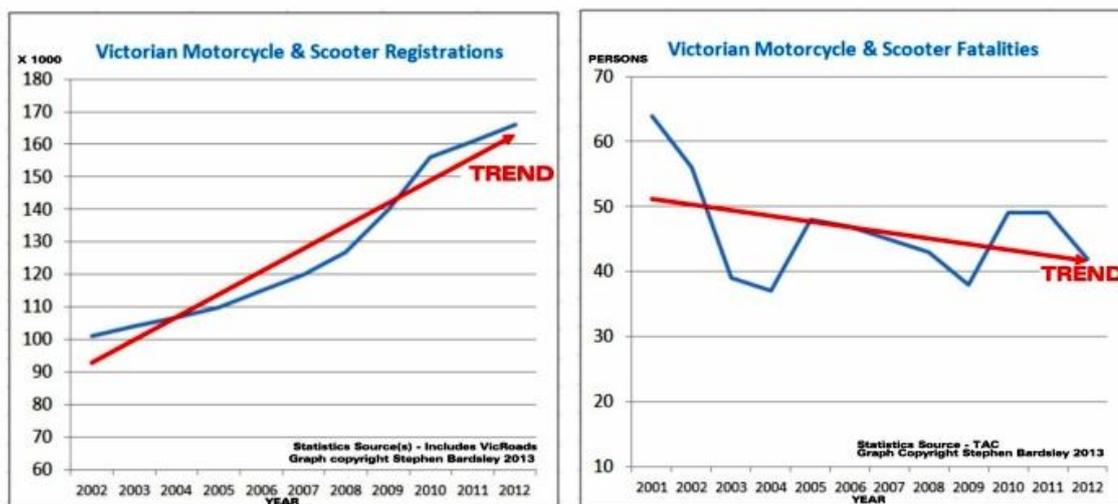


Figure 1
Motorcycle & Scooter Registrations v Fatalities

As shown in Figure 1, whereas the registration of Motorcycles and Scooters during the last ten years has increased by some 70%, the trend for fatalities has decreased by almost 30%. In other words; 70% more Riders and 30% less fatalities! Yet since 2002 Victorian Riders of Motorcycles with engines having a capacity greater than 126cc have been forced to pay a discriminatory and so called “Safety Levy”. This additional tax on Motorcyclists has raised in excess of \$45 Million from Riders, who can certainly be seen as paying a hefty price for the illegitimate “Menace” of the Road stereotype created by amongst other things so called “safety campaigns”.

8) A call for a new approach

The VSRA asks could the TAC and VicRoads take a different and more conciliatory approach towards Motorcycles and Scooter Riders? For example; instead of using campaigns portraying Riders as the “Menace” and suggesting the responsibility for road safety is only applicable to Riders, might they alternatively prepare campaigns highlighting the vulnerability of Riders and showing how road safety need be a shared responsibility of all Road users.

9) Parliamentary Inquiry Recommendations

A new approach is certainly proposed in the recommendations resulting from the Parliamentary Inquiry into Motorcycle Safety (PIMS). These include recommendations the TAC and VicRoads should investigate different ways of improving Motorcycle safety. Recommendation No 55 suggests this be achieved implementing behavioural change programs to the Driver Licence curriculum and road rules, to highlight risks posed to Motorcyclists by Drivers.

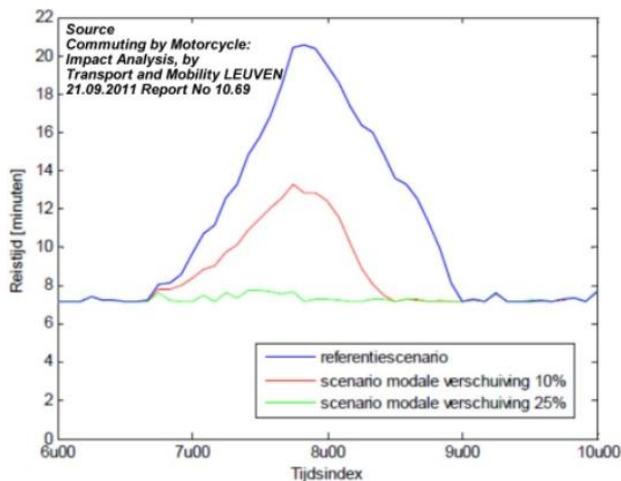
PIMS recommendation No 22 suggests the TAC focus Motorcycle Safety advertising on redressing the attitude the responsibility for Rider safety is solely attributable to the Rider, this by ensuring campaigns dealing with Motorcycles raise Driver awareness and do not create negative stereotypes, perceptions or attitudes of Riders. These recommendations can only be positive and may indeed be the first significant step towards eliminating the “Law of the Jungle” that currently prevails on Victorian Roads.

10) Shared Responsibility

Other Countries promote road safety as a shared responsibility and use campaigns promoting Motorcycles and Scooters not as a “Menace”, but as “Friends” of Drivers. For example the UK Campaign “Think Biker” uses the “if you got to know me, we could be the best of friends” theme, yet here in Victoria, Riders are frequently portrayed negatively as the “Menace” of the Road and this stereotype is used as justification for forcing Riders to pay a safety levy, a burden not shared by Drivers. How can Victorian Drivers be expected to appreciate the concept of shared responsibility relative to Road Safety, when they observe road safety authorities acting punitively towards Riders and perpetuating the stereotype that Riders are a “Menace”?

11) Motorcycles, the answer to the World's urban traffic congestion!

The negative stereotyping and attitudes towards Motorcycle and Scooter Riders in Victoria is not only highly illegitimate, but is in sharp contrast to reality. A recent European report shows how Motorcycles and Scooters offer massive benefits to all road users and that the answer to the World's urban traffic congestion may be as simple as creating policies to actually promote Motorcycle and Scooter commuting.



If just 10% of all private cars are replaced by Motorcycles, then the total commuting time losses can decrease by 40%.

Figure 2

Travel times on the E40 between Leuven & Sint-Stevens-Woluwe/Woluwe Saint Etienne in the morning rush hour in the reference and two modal shift scenarios

The report included a detailed study² finding that even a slight shift in traffic composition from cars to motorcycles significantly reduces traffic congestion and emissions. The Study identified if just 10% of all private cars were replaced by motorcycles, then the total commuting time losses for all vehicles would decrease by 40%. The Report reveals a further sustainable benefit to Society is a total emissions reduction of 6%.

12) A Last Word

When Motorcycles and Scooters can be seen to provide such quantifiable benefits reducing travelling time for all road users and offering a credible solution to global traffic congestion and whilst also helping to make the Planet a better place for all inhabitants by significantly reducing pollution and emissions, surely as occurs in other Countries, it is time for Australian and in particular Victorian road safety agencies to stop **“hitting the wrong target”** and instead promote and encourage the use of Motorcycles and Scooters, this in preference to portraying Riders as a “menace” on the Road.

¹ Sweeney Research conducted the AAMI-commissioned research in which 2382 Australians were surveyed nationally.

² By Belgian consultancy Transport & Mobility Leuven and presented at the Association des Constructeurs Européens de Motorcycles (ACEM) 2012 Conference in Brussels.

³ The report from the Victorian Parliamentary Road Safety Committee cites the Monash University Accident Research Centre's Professor Mark Stevenson as saying the “38 times” more likely figure is inaccurate.

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Footnote: The Author of this article Stephen Bardsley, has been a Scooter Rider for over 40 years and is the Spokesman for the Victorian Scooter Riders Association (VSRA) and the President of the Lambretta Club of Australia Incorporated. Stephen is the qualified Assessor for the Melbourne Crusaders Scooter Club Rider Training School, which instructs Scooter riders at all levels in safe riding theory and practice.