

Foundation was formed.

The MRF does not, in any way, “run” ABATE or any of the other SMROs. Those are still independent and autonomous organizations. The MRF’s purpose, as a separate entity, is to act as a conduit for communication and a clearing house for information among and between the varied motorcycle rights organizations. Perhaps even more importantly, they provide a means through which nearly a quarter-million motorcyclists can act in concert, and speak with one, loud voice. And yet, though the MRF might “represent” a huge number of riders by acting as the spokesperson for the groups those riders belong to, the Foundation itself consists of only about 2800 dues-paying members. Or about 1% the size of the AMA.

### **What Have They Done For Me?**

In 1988, the MRF became the first motorcycling organization to open an office on Capitol Hill, to hire a full-time, professional lobbyist, and to get itself registered and approved as an official, legal, lobbying agency before Congress. In 1991, the MRF lobbied against Senate Bill 339, also known as the Outlaw Motorcycle Gang Bill. This was a bill supposedly aimed at controlling inner city gangs and drug trafficking, but which specifically singled out motorcyclists as likely suspects. The MRF was instrumental in having the bill re-written to eliminate all references to motorcycles and motorcyclists. In 1993, when the Traumatic Brain Injury Act was proposed, the MRF successfully lobbied not only to kill it, because of its promotion of the “motorcyclists as a social burden” language, but managed to actually replace it with an entirely new bill, promoting motorcyclists’ rights. Then, in 1996, as a direct result of lobbying by the MRF, along with the AMA, the Health Care Coverage Availability and Affordability Act was passed to include provisions that prohibited employer-based health care plans from discriminating against those who ride. (Ironically, when the Clinton administration issued this regulation, its language provided a loophole that allowed insurers to continue health care discrimination against motorcyclists. That loophole is being dealt with during this session of Congress.)

On July 4, 1996, the Motorcycle Riders Foundation was awarded the American Executive Excellence in Government Relations Trophy, in recognition of their leadership in the repeal of ISTEA Section 153 penalties (the federal “helmet blackmail” provision), and for the return of over 80% of the previously-withheld state highway funds.

In 2003, the MRF commissioned Garrett A. Vaughn, PhD, to perform what is now

titled as the “MRF Economic Impact Study,” in response to the EPA’s then-proposed Rule on Emissions for Street Motorcycles. This study documented the dramatic negative effect this rule will have on hometown shops, small manufacturers, and the aftermarket industry. In 2004, the MRF’s “EPA For The Layman” paper was released. This paper clearly informs individuals of the dramatic, negative effect the EPA ruling will have directly on them.

Also in 2004, the MRF gained a seat at the table in Geneva to include US motorcyclists’ input in the ongoing United Nations discussions (that will lead to decisions) regarding Global Harmonization of Motorcycle Standards. This allows us to at least have our voice heard, with the goal of keeping the standards set as least-restrictive as possible when the coming global standards become reality.

And, in addition to all their work on the legislative front, if you check, you will find that in many states, it is the MRF or one of its member SMROs that facilitates and/or manages rider education programs. That is because the MRF has adopted an official stance that the answer to nearly all of motorcycling’s problems, including rising accident statistics, noise issues, alcohol use, etc., is better rider education, not restrictive legislation. Their mantra is, “Education, not Legislation.”

### **Where Is The AMA?**

If you are anything like me, you belong to the AMA, and have always believed that with its size and resources, it is our best bet for defending motorcyclists against discriminatory legislation, or even possibly, the loss of our right to ride. While it is true that the AMA has done a tremendous amount of good in the rights arena, and has often worked hand-in-hand with the MRF on many of the issues related here, it is also true that the vast majority of those deeply involved in the motorcycle rights movement believe that the AMA simply has too many other agendas to pursue, and devotes only a small percentage of its resources and influence to protecting riders’ rights. Then, too, there is the “conflict of interest” theory, in that the real power on the AMA’s Board of Directors is made up of representatives from the major motorcycle manufacturers, and not the rank-and-file members. An illustrative case in point would be in regards to the upcoming EPA regulations on street motorcycles. These new regulations will essentially ban the manufacture and sale of custom motorcycles; only allow an individual to “customize” one bike in their entire lifetime (and then be prohibited from selling it); will allow customized bikes to be used for show only (and never ridden); will

virtually eliminate the aftermarket parts and accessories market (except for those sold by OEMs); and will put most local, independent bike shops out of business. Though the AMA was instrumental in establishing the first meetings between the EPA and the MRF to discuss these issues, it has since steadfastly refused to join the MRF in opposing the new regulations, adopting a “no comment” stance, and, by ignoring the issue, tacitly approving the regulations. As these new regulations would obviously benefit the major manufacturers by essentially eliminating much of their competition in the marketplace, one has to wonder who is making such policy decisions for the AMA, and on whose behalf?

### **What Can I Do?**

Certainly neither I nor the MRF is suggesting anyone should quit the AMA, or remove their support from them in any way. They do far too much good to advocate such extreme measures. But what we are saying is that if you are truly interested in protecting your rights as a motorcyclist, perhaps you should consider throwing some of your support in the direction of the MRF, also. As it stands now, a tiny percentage of motorcyclists, working with a miniscule budget, are practically the only thing that stands between us and the bureaucrats that would legislate our lifestyle out of existence. The MRF is a dedicated, passionate and selfless group that works tirelessly to protect our rights. Look at what they have accomplished, and you’ve got to be impressed. And we haven’t even mentioned the hundreds of issues they’ve successfully dealt with at the state and local levels.

Membership costs a measly \$25 per year for an individual, or \$40 for a couple. And, as the threats to motorcycling mount, they desperately need for more of us to get involved if they are to maintain their level of commitment, and their incredible success ratio. Check out their website at [www.mrf.org](http://www.mrf.org), or call the DC office at (202) 546-0983 and ask for a complimentary copy of their publication, the “MRF Reports,” to see what they are all about. I think you’ll be impressed.

I leave you with this quote:

*“Of all tyrannies, a tyranny sincerely exercised for the good of its victims may be the most oppressive. It may be better to live under robber barons than under omnipotent moral busybodies. The robber baron’s cruelty may sometimes sleep, his cupidity may at some point be satiated; but those who torment us for our own good will torment us without end, for they do so with the approval of their own conscience.”*

—C.S. Lewis