

had been rumors, but with MCN checking the facts independently, it suddenly became clear that most of the rumors were true.

After publication, we immediately received many e-mails from those in the rider training industry, confirming that what I'd said was just the tip of the iceberg, and adding some facts we didn't know. But what was weird was that everyone pleaded with us to not use their name or state, for fear of retribution from the MSF. After all, the MSF could yank their instructor certification, program recognition number, course insurance, loaner bikes or whatever.

Since those short articles appeared, there has been a lot of babbling about what was said or not said. If you have an interest in the subject, I suggest you read the entire "Trouble In Rider Training" report, so that you'll know exactly what appeared in print. And if I've said anything that is untrue, I want you to contact me and set the record straight. Facts, please.

The MRF

The Motorcycle Riders Foundation (MRF) has taken a considerable interest in training issues recently. The MRF is an alliance of state's rights organizations (SROs). SROs, primarily ABATE groups, manage the rider training programs in several states, including Alaska and Indiana. Their website, www.mrf.org, provides a lot of information about what's happening, including access to radio broadcasts such as the panel discussion "The Future of Rider Training," which was part of the MRF Meeting Of The Minds conference. Here's an opportunity to listen to Tim Buche, Ron Shepard and others openly discuss the important issues.

Since publication of the articles in MCN, the situation has continued to unfold like a court case on "Judge Judy." We've discovered that in Georgia, lobbyists for the MSF and MIC have been holding private discussions about motorcycle training, apparently for several years. In Georgia, motorcyclists pay surcharges on motorcycle licenses. The money is deposited into the state general fund, and the motorcycle coordinator has to request an allocation every year to run his program. Someone started badmouthing the Georgia motorcycle training program, and then counseled state officials to reduce the program budget to \$0, effective July 1, 2004. So now Georgia riders pay into the state fund, and none of it is returned to support rider training, thanks, most likely, to the MSF and MIC.

But, following publication of our "Trouble In Rider Training" report, we've heard that MSF lobbyists have approached the state training coordinator with the message that the MSF doesn't want to take over the Georgia program after all, and how can they work together? The high-priced lobbyists haven't asked me, but my suggestion would be to get back with the bureaucrats and request that the budget for motorcycle rider training be restored.

Oregon, Idaho and Hawaii are still refusing to accept the MSF's new Basic Rider Course (BRC), which the MSF has demanded everyone switch to, no later than the end of 2004. With an eye toward having something to replace the "old" MRC:RSS new rider course, Team Oregon developed its own course. However, MSF lawyers have initiated a lawsuit against Team Oregon for infringement of "intellectual property." Idaho and Hawaii intend to keep on using the "old" MRC:RSS, since the MSF seems to have provided

the materials with no end-of-life date. MSF has notified each instructor in these three states that failure to get updated to the "new" BRC will cause their instructor certifications to lapse. The letter even went out to two Hawaii instructors who are currently on active military duty.

So, it appears that there is a great struggle for power underway, with the MSF using its considerable industry funding to either force state administrators to toe the line, or if that doesn't work, to underbid the current contractor and take over the program (as the MSF has already done in California). Only three states have had the nerve to challenge the MSF. They have the strange idea that individual states know best what their riders need. MSF may be very shocked when they find out that there are other states talking discreetly with Team Oregon about using their novice course rather than the MSF's BRC.

We haven't heard much from the American Motorcyclist Association (AMA) about all this. AMA was invited to an MSF board of trustees meeting in March, along with representatives from the MRF, military rider training (DOD-DSOC) and State Motorcycle Safety Administrators Association (SMSA). The AMA has managed to arrange some ongoing meetings with the MSF, but we have yet to hear what's happening. AMA president Rob Razor has been invited to write a guest editorial for publication in MCN. We can understand that since the AMA has a heavy representation from the industry, and the industry funds the MIC and MSF, AMA staffers are walking a tightrope. All the same, we're hoping that AMA will provide a statement to MCN.

So, Are We The Bad Guys?

I know there are readers who will accuse me of being the bad guy in this scenario. Why run down a national organization that we so desperately need? As one industry employee put it, "...Why take such an adversarial outlook on everything? If you think something isn't as good as it could be—then be proactive and get involved in actually improving it. Volunteer, become an instructor, interview someone from the MSF, seek information/resolution directly from the board, etc, instead of being an adversary and spreading doubt and negativity among others who want to happily enjoy the sport. We have enough adversarial pressure from the anti-motorcycle joe-public, we don't need to run the sport down ourselves..."

Well, apparently this writer doesn't know that I have been proactive: I've been an instructor, I've volunteered, I've written skills articles and donated them to club magazines and newsletters, and I've done seminars at rallies. MCN did interview MSF president Tim Buche and some of his staff, and are still wading through the "inconsistencies." A condensed version of that meeting follows this article. Otherwise, it's awfully difficult to "talk to the board," since their meetings are closed, and they expect Tim Buche to be the mouthpiece.

Look, I'm only the messenger here. The message is that the national organization that has been responsible for rider training has taken an adversarial stance that is having a negative effect on motorcycling. The rider training system desperately needs some family counseling. 🗨️

