

ing organizations, instructors, the SMSA, the MRF, nor the AMA. In Ron's opinion, "Lack of communication from the MSF does nothing to improve rider education or the state programs that work so hard to provide quality rider education and who have created a well-oiled system that has trained over three million riders."

### MSF First Quarter 2004 Board Meeting

In an attempt to smooth all the ruffled feathers, the MSF invited several motorcycle organizations to attend the MSF Board of Trustees meeting in Irvine, CA on March 19, including the American Motorcycle Association (AMA), Motorcycle Riders Foundation (MRF), SMSA, and DODDSOC (military rider training). Obviously, everyone was interested to see whether the MSF had changed its tune and was really interested in a dialogue.

In its Press Release notice, the MSF recapped the meeting by stating, "MSF is encouraged by this exchange of ideas and is committed to exploring how we can all best collaborate and communicate on key motorcycle safety issues to further what the MSF considers its overriding goals: To increase training capacity; provide access to lifelong learning; and to improve the riding safety and enjoyment of all current and potential motorcyclists."

Sounds great, but that optimistic PR blurb isn't backed up by what our MCN moles say actually happened at the conference. The MSF said it was interested in exchanging ideas, but the meeting format was designed to make sure there would be minimal contact between its board and the invitees. For instance, half the day was taken up by a *closed* board meeting, while the invitees twiddled their thumbs in the waiting room. Then, for lunch, the board went into one room, while the invitees were segregated into a separate room. Any of that sound like "collaborating and communicating" to you? Only Jack Kelly (from BMW) had the nerve to go to the "wrong" room and lunch with the invitees. After lunch, MSF staff held the podium and rambled on for almost an hour about the MSF's past accomplishments. Then, finally, the invitees were given a few minutes to express their joint concerns to the board.

Rob Rasor, President of the American Motorcyclist Association (AMA), Karen Bolin, President of the Motorcycle Riders Foundation (MRF), and Ron Shepard, Chairman of the National Association of State Motorcycle Safety Administrators (SMSA) were united in their call for greater cooperation with the MSF. All three organizations have supported the MSF, and want it to be successful, but they made it clear

that the MSF has an obligation to communicate with the stakeholders in rider education. And they had solid ideas and suggestions on how that might happen.

Karen Bolin requested that the MSF include MRF representatives on the MSF board of trustees. Rob Rasor requested regularly scheduled meetings between AMA and MSF to share information. Ron Shepard delivered a list of questions to the MSF board. When and if the MSF responds, we'll be ready to publish their answers.

### What's Next?

Will the MSF/MIC really open up and begin a renewed dialogue with the other organizations? We'll be watching. And, what are all those MIC lobbyists up to? We don't know, but there are thousands of motorcycle enthusiasts across the USA who have worked so tirelessly in creating, supporting and teaching rider training programs—and they are the backbone of motorcycle safety—who deserve some answers. And we mean real, meaningful answers—not some PR hype. We think it would be best for motorcycling if the MIC, MSF, and SVIA explained their future plans to national organizations such as the MRF and AMA, so that we all know what is happening. In the meanwhile, we strongly suggest that you start tracking who is lobbying for changes to motorcycle laws in your state, and finding out what's in their agenda.

### But, What's Wrong With MSF or H-D Running State Programs?

Is it a good or bad idea for the MSF or Harley-Davidson—or any other manufacturer—to be conducting rider training independently of the state programs? MRF President Karen Bolin suggests that the training programs need accountability. With the MSF managing rider training, there is no oversight of how the money is being spent. Note that the MSF now runs two of the largest motorcycle safety programs in the nation, Pennsylvania and California, with combined budgets in excess of \$3 million. That's a lot of greenbacks, and a big temptation to siphon off state money for something other than rider training.

The jury is still out on Riders Edge, but let's note that all the manufacturers are financially interested in more students passing a course and buying a bike, so there is also a financial interest to "dumb down" the curriculum until everyone graduates. With training controlled by the manufacturers, no one can deny the obvious temptation to simplify and streamline the training to pass as many people through the system as possible, with less emphasis on quality than on quantity. With state supervised training, students who can't master the techniques don't

get a completion card. Some people just shouldn't be on motorcycles.

### Don't Shoot the Messenger

This report was prompted by dozens of phone calls and e-mails from long-time rider instruction trainers, site administrators, and state directors who have devoted their lives to the improvement of rider education in this country. MCN has had a strong relationship with many of these people for as much as 20 years and more, trusts their opinions, and admires their dedication. When that many people who have had a close working relationship with the MSF for many years suddenly all start asking, "What the heck is going on?", we feel obligated to try to find some answers.

We're only reporting the news here, not making it. We want you to be aware that the face of rider training is changing. If the changes concern you, or your wallet, our suggestion is to get involved in the action. Find out who is lobbying on your behalf down at the state capitol. Take in a motorcycle association or ABATE meeting, or register for the next MRF conference. Take a BRC or ERC course and see if you like the new training concepts. Check out the MSF, AMA, and MRF websites.

In our search for what's really happening, we received some comments that we'd like to share:

"The Motorcycle Safety Foundation's primary focus should be developing high quality rider training curricula. I don't believe that the MSF should have any role in state program administration."

"For the MSF to be effective and helpful in their role as a curriculum developer for all users, they need to work with all stakeholders, including state administrators, when developing curriculum. The MSF should be free to provide suggestions and legislative help to state programs to make them better, not to take them over."

"The MSF should concentrate on creating well-developed and field tested curricula that State Administrators can implement right out of the box. As good as the Basic RiderCourse is, it was absolutely not ready for nationwide use when it was released."

We know that there is lots more that could be told about rider training, but also realize that program coordinators, instructors, coaches, lobbyists and MSF staff are justifiably nervous about going on record about how they really feel, or what's really happening. Feel free to send us an e-mail or letter, and we'll honor any requests to stay "off the record." And if you're an instructor or rider coach, please, keep doing what you're doing. You're saving lives and helping riders to enjoy our sport.

We need you. 🍀