

New Zealand Motorcyclists — A Statistical Dilemma

by Malcolm Kernot

Preamble:

The New Zealand Public enjoys a comprehensive 'no fault' accident insurance cover administered by their Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC). All wage earners and employers pay a compulsory levy into the scheme; the amount calculated against risk factors applicable to each particular occupation.

The ACC Motor Vehicle Account covers all expenses for all injuries involving motor vehicles of all kinds on public roads. The account is fully funded from a tax on fuel sales plus a component of the annual motor vehicle registration fee.

Car owners, and owners of motorcycles over 60cc engine capacity, pay 70% of their annual vehicle registration costs in ACC levies.

All are, in fact, buying compulsory insurance cover from the ACC.

Motorcycles are but 3% of all vehicles registered for use on New Zealand roads.

In the 1998/1999 financial year the cost to the ACC of all claims for injuries to all motor vehicle drivers and passengers was \$167,602,000. (New Zealand dollars.) Injuries specific to motorcycle riders and passengers accounted for \$37,259,000 (N.Z.) or 22% of the 'all motor vehicles' total. ("Accident Compensation Injury Statistics 1999" Accident Compensation Corporation, Wellington, New Zealand. May 2000).

New Zealand Motorcycle Rider Licensing:

In 1990 I wrote a paper about the New Zealand Motorcycle Rider Licensing System for the Motorcycle Safety Foundation's 1st International Motorcycle Safety Conference (1990 International Motorcycle Safety Conference Proceedings. Page 2-17. "Motorcycle Rider Licensing in New Zealand - A Tough System" Malcolm J. Kernot. Taupo, New Zealand).

During 1990 in New Zealand, a "Lifetime" Graduated Driver Licensing System was introduced. The 'steps' of this licence, with their individual cost structures, fitted well with a swing to the right in New Zealand politics and the introduction of a "User Pays" national economic philosophy.

Within a decade that "Lifetime" component has been abandoned. Its replacement is a "World Best Practice" philosophy of driver licensing that, for recruit motorcycle riders, can be challenged as to optimum standards and values.

In 1993 the New Zealand Ministry of Transport was restructured into three separate "Crown Entities." The Maritime Safety Authority, the Civil Aviation Authority and the Land Transport Safety Authority. The Land Transport Safety Authority (LTSA) states that its principal function is "To undertake activities that promote land transport safety at a reasonable cost" and states also that its 'vision' is "To create a safety culture in New Zealand that delivers land transport safety outcomes that achieve world best practice".

The New Zealand Graduated "Lifetime" Licensing System soon came under the scrutiny of the LTSA reformers.

Despite all New Zealand drivers having paid "Lifetime" fees for their revised "Lifetime" Licence (fees paid in advance up to their 71st birthday) the licence was printed on poor quality paper, was easy to photocopy and came under intense criticism for having no worth at all as a means of positive identification.

Throughout the 1990's much traffic law in New Zealand was revisited, revised and re-written.

In 1998 a new Act of Parliament, the 'Land Transport Act, 1998' was passed into law making substantive changes to parts of transport law such as driver licensing and including provision for a totally new, state-of-the-art, plastic card driver's licence with a digitally recorded photograph of the authorised holder as positive identification and a range of holographic security features.

In May 1999 the Land Transport Safety Authority allotted its contractors a 14 month period to complete the mammoth task of providing 1.4 million licensed New Zealand drivers with a replacement photo licence - at an additional pro-rata cost to each holder.

In the period before licence changeovers began the LTSA took steps to consult with interest groups and expert persons with a view to refining and improving the "Graduated" steps for recruit drivers. This part of the system had provided good results but there were problems with enforcement provisions at the "Restricted" phase and researchers within the LTSA were of the opinion that the time credits for professional tuition in both the "Learner" and "Restricted" phases were of dubious value. Indeed, of professional tuition itself, they professed the same opinion.

From the world of motorcycle riding tuition, representation was again made strongly for the introduction of pre-licence recruit rider *training* as an improvement on the pre-licence system of *testing* which was the best we had been able to achieve at the time of the "Graduated" system's introduction in 1990. These requests were again refused.

The decision to retain pre-licence testing, while professing an intention to achieve “World Best Practice”, could claim some rationale from the declining rate of on-road motorcycle registrations and the place of New Zealand as 14th on a 24 country list of motorcyclist fatalities as a percentage of all road deaths. (“Motor Accidents in New Zealand 1999” Page 150. Land Transport Safety Authority. Wellington. New Zealand.)

Aspects of the pre-licence “Basic Handling Skills Tests” did come under review and a small group was formed to revise this specific-to-motorcyclists test – the basis for all subsequent motorcycling skills. A more appropriate set of skills tests, modelled closely on Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MRC.RSS) Range Activities Exercises, was suggested and accepted into law with revised requirements for an improved test range layout and revised tests which would allow better demonstration of braking skills.

New Zealand drivers have traditionally had easy access to a “Road Code” booklet, provided at little or no cost, to enable study of traffic laws for licensing purposes. The new “User Pays” LTSA philosophies had replaced this system with a \$20.00 per copy “*Road Code and Licence Guide*” in the mid 1990’s. As part of the traffic law revisions at the implementation of the photo driver’s licence, this production was divided into three, with separate books for car driver, heavy motor vehicle driver and motorcycle rider. It is fair to say that “*The Official New Zealand Road Code and Licence Guide for Motorcyclists*” is an impressive and substantial document of 190 pages that does provide a sound basis for the learning and revision of traffic law, defensive riding techniques and riding skills for all New Zealand riders. At \$25.00 a copy, and being a necessity for any recruit rider in New Zealand, so it should be!

In 1994, the deliberations of the Accident Compensation Corporation’s “Motorcycle Task Force” and the writing of Unit Standards for Car Driving and Motorcycle Riding for the New Zealand Qualifications Authority’s “Learning Framework” kept the idea and business of motorcycle rider safety promotion at a lively and demanding level.

Motorcycle clubs, Biker’s Rights advocates and established motorcycle riding schools maintained their local efforts at rider safety promotion through to the introduction of the photo driver license and its revised driving laws.

Annual statistics, though, refuse to change. Remarkably, they stay close to the same figures year-by-year.

Motorcycles are 3% of registered vehicles on New Zealand roads.

Each year between 10% and 14% of fatalities on New Zealand roads are motorcyclists.

Motorcyclists are also 10% to 14% of on road casualties annually.

Now, at the end of the year 2000, the Accident Compensation Corporation are back as movers and shakers in the New Zealand road safety community. They have a large surplus in their motor vehicle account and have reactivated their Injury Prevention Division.

The ACC have formed a “Motorcycle Reference Group” and have dusted off the report of their 1994 “Motorcycle Task Force.” They are prepared to spend hard money to find sound ideas for positive solutions to reduce the costs of motor-cyclist injury trauma to their motor vehicle account.

The ACC Motorcycle Reference Group of the year 2000 has a wider cross-section of motorcycle rider group representatives and motorcycle safety activists than have ever before been brought together in New Zealand.

Motorcycle safety is back in the New Zealand road safety world at a level more reflective of its annual social and economic costs to the community.

What innovative solutions can we find that will effectively reduce the over-representation of motorcyclists and their passengers within our country’s road toll statistics?

That’s our best reason for being at Orlando in March 2001.