

## Motorcycle safety and parking issues debated

By **Ted Latumus**

When it comes to safety and parking, things have been getting more precarious for motorcyclists in B.C. According to a recent report by a B.C. Coroners Service panel, some 286 riders died in accidents between 2000 and 2007. Do the math and that comes to about 40 riders a year. Whether you ride a cruiser, tourer, scooter, dual-purpose, crotch rocket, or supermotard, when you climb aboard you're taking more of a risk than ever. Things are so bad out there, some riders describe riding in traffic as *Death Race 2000*, in reference to the old blood-and-guts David Carradine/Sylvester Stallone flick of the 1970s.

To that end, the solicitor general recently announced that said report is going to be forwarded to the superintendent of motor vehicles, along with recommendations from the panel aimed at improving conditions for riders. "It's clear that with more riders on the road, motorcycle safety is an area where improvements need to be made," said Kash Heed in a March 18 news release.

The report includes recommendations to:

- ▶Require mandatory industry certification for all motorcycle helmets.
- ▶Establish a graduated-licence program for new riders.
- ▶Implement a zero-tolerance blood-alcohol policy for new riders.
- ▶Issue a different-coloured licence plate to motorcyclists who hold a learner's licence.
- ▶Re-evaluate existing standards for training schools and instructor certification.
- ▶Expand the scope of coroner's investigations involving motorcycle deaths to include more data and compile it in a specific section for better analysis in the future.

While British Columbia Coalition of Motorcyclists executive director Adele Tompkins thinks some of these suggestions make sense, she says the report as a whole doesn't get to the heart of the problem.

"The bigger picture here is more about proper training for riders and raising public awareness than it is about legislating helmets," she says. "It's my opinion that the coroner's office just listened to ICBC and law-enforcement people, and did not talk to the people who are directly affected—the motorcyclists."

Tompkins points out that BCCOM has been advocating public awareness and graduated licensing for some time now, but worries that the coroner's recommendations will be used to ram through new helmet legislation, which has been a thorn in the side of law-enforcement personnel for years. The famed "B.C. beanie" has been the subject of controversy since it first fell through the cracks of the Motor Vehicle Act in 1987, when this legislation was challenged in court and found to be wanting. Hence the undersized—but perfectly legal—skid-lids used by some riders that offer about as much protection as a cereal bowl. "This report is kind of a knee-jerk reaction," Tompkins adds, "and is focused in the wrong direction."

Interestingly, it isn't just beanie wearers who may be affected by the recommendations. Sikh motorcyclists have also challenged this section of the Motor Vehicle Act, on the grounds that their religious headgear prevents them from wearing a helmet of any kind. In order to wear a helmet, they say, they would have to remove their turbans, which they are not willing to do. It'll be interesting to see how this one plays out.

Another hot-button issue for motorcyclists in Vancouver these days is parking—or the lack of it. Vancouver has over 26,000 registered motorcycle and scooter riders, and they have a grand total of 42 dedicated parking spaces to choose from. As a result, riders pretty much park wherever they can, often receiving a ticket or a tow-job for their efforts. Multiple parking by bikes in automobile parking spots, for example, is illegal, and you still can't park your bike on the sidewalk. In Toronto, parking for motorcycles is free virtually throughout the city and you're allowed to park your scooter on the sidewalk, provided it doesn't block pedestrians.

Responding to various complaints, the City of Vancouver did have a look at the parking situation and came up with some recommendations. Chief among them are free parking for pedal-assisted scooters, limited-speed motorcycles/scooters, and zero-emission scooters; and a provision for multiple motorcycle parking in regular automobile spots, provided users use the city's pay-by-phone system.

These recommendations were part of a report that was to be presented to city council. However, the report has apparently gone missing, and at this point everything seems to be in limbo. "Geoff Meggs was supposed to be stickhandling all this," says motorcycle activist Ian Tootill, "but he's been hospitalized, and no one seems to know where the report is." And anyway, says Tootill, the recommendations are stupid and pointless. "There are so few of these kinds of scooters, they might as well not have bothered. And the pay-by-phone system is cumbersome and hard to use.

"Vancouver staff have virtually ignored any public input," continues Tootill, "and the city is fixated on everybody paying for parking. The core of the problem is that city staff cannot shake their dogma concerning paid parking, and instead of providing free parking that is clearly in the interests of everybody, they hatched a complicated, costly plan that would not make the city any money and would do nothing for motorcyclists and scooters."

Stay tuned.