



Perceptions and Personal Opinions about MRF Meeting of the Minds

by Tony Pan Sanfelipo

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I've just returned from the annual MRF Meeting of the Minds, held in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. As usual, I found it interesting and stimulating, despite some frustrations. Overall, it's a worthwhile educational and motivational tool, much more productive than any other organization type gathering. One noteworthy item is it is not an endorsement or commercial for any legal service program supposedly out there to benefit "us bikers".

Although I didn't make all the workshops, an impossible task, I did manage to make a few and have some opinions on them. I also listened to the opening ceremony speeches which were enlightening. Here are some of my observations:

Ed Youngblood addresses gathering

American Motorcyclist Association president, Ed Youngblood, spoke of motorcycling's future and gave some insight into the AMA. He also clarified his article in the AMA magazine dealing with product liability suits. He was very passionate and honest in his approach, careful not to condemn or criticize NCOM or any of its Board of Advisors (now known as Board of Directors). His anger was directed at the correct target, Richard Lester and the AIM attorneys who initiated so called product liability cases against, specifically, Harley Davidson Motor Company.

He explained that there is a need for product liability and representation for injured bikers, but not in the context of these suits, and not under the guise of being a network of attorneys dedicated to the biker's rights movement. Bravo, Ed Youngblood. If anyone has been paying attention to these suits, they are actually

aimed (no pun intended) at punishing Harley Davidson for not providing leg protection to the rider. Ed was adamant about this. He said no matter what the AIM attorneys or Richard Lester claims the suits say, there is no doubt that they refer to "no leg protection". This is what all the fervor is about. As recognized by other rights leaders, these boiler plate, fill in the blanks lawsuits, have no place in the real world of biker's rights and have dealt a damaging blow to our brothers and sisters in Europe who are fighting this type of legislation as you read this.

Finally, someone of authority has placed the correct cordon over Lester's head, Liar, Tyrant, Money Grubber.

New World Order

Simon Milward, Federation of European Motorcyclists (FEM) explained in his workshop, "Motorcycling and the New World Order", the move toward globalization of motorcycle manufacturing standards. It's a scary concept and it's already happening. In fact, Simon and Erwin Renette, also of FEM, warned that it is unstoppable. Our only chance is to effect or impact some of the changes that are bound to happen. What are they referring to? Standard equipment for motorcycles, worldwide, including leg protection devices that look like an anomaly of the fairing. Air bags, non-tamper engines and bike components. In otherwords, a one size fits all approach to motorcycles. No alterations allowed. No personalizing, no customizing, period. Anti-tamper exhaust systems, frames, transmissions, etc. These parts will be serial numbered, incorporated with things like shear bolts or other fastening systems making it impossible to remove or alter. Already in Europe, there are bans on certain roadways, usually the curving, twisting roads that are most attractive to us, restricting motorcycles from using them in the name of safety.

Who is behind this movement? Curiously, manufacturer's themselves support this, especially the Japanese bike builders, according to Milward. Legislators are also lining up in support. There seems no way to prevent the inevitable but perhaps we can limit the amount of intrusion into our lifestyle. MRF Vice President of Government Affairs, Wayne Curtin, gave us a hint of this impending crisis last year when he warned about motorcycles not being in the equation of the so called *smart highway systems* being planned for America's roadways. Computer aided automobiles, which automatically brake when nearing other autos or upon entering into curves, programmable trip routes whereby you just punch in a destination and the car will take you there, etc. Wow, what fun that will add to the driving experience. And how do you fit a motorcycle into this scenario?

It's way over due that we start addressing these concerns and not be trapped into tunnel vision about such things as helmet laws and biker discrimination. If the

current trend continues, there will be no motorcycles for our children to enjoy, a lifestyle erased. Look to history my friends, look how many cultures have been destroyed or Americanized by government standards. Ask Native Americans about their lifestyle being eradicated. This threat is real. *Pay attention or pay the price.*

How to argue the helmet law without using the F word.

This is always a fun, changing workshop put on by Rick and Gail Gray. It has some very useful tips, some I don't personally agree with, but a general course cannot address everyone's style. The only observation I want to make here is a statement Rick made about how far the movement has come in 20 years and that we don't shit in helmets anymore (I don't remember that part, but the late '60s and early '70s are somewhat of a blur) and we don't burn them on the steps of the Capitol. While that's true, in defense of our strategies in those days, I reminded Rick that we retrogressives repealed more helmet laws than anyone or any group in history. It was a different time, but we were effective and I'm not entirely sure that civil disobedience and helmet burning doesn't have a place in today's movement. Maybe a little political uncorrectness might show some of these jerks we mean business.

Freedom Fighters absence

I proudly wore my BOLT belt buckle at the MOTM conference, but outside of Jim Rhodes, founding member of ABATE of Michigan who wore a BOLT cap, there were no other visible members there. Despite some claims by some of California's MRO's, there are many more members of BOLT and HLDL supporters than they would lead you to believe. Although our achievements are diminished or unreported, we are flattered by the fact that others have taken our lead in fighting the beanie helmet law controversy, and Wayne Curtin himself has advised we take on NHTSA, head on and toe to toe. That's what I like to hear. That agency should be reprimanded for using it's authority to lobby against our efforts, when in reality they are charged with preventing accidents. They are not supposed to be urging mandates such as helmet laws nor using tax dollars to funnel one sided reports to legislators in an effort to lobby against us. HLDL and BOLT took on NHTSA back in 1993, and haven't let go of the horns yet. Our 1 page, "12 Questions NHTSA Doesn't Want To Answer" questionnaire about helmets, testing, approvals, etc. is a landmark in addressing NHTSA role. There were actually 13 questions, the last one being "Does anyone at the federal DOT or NHTSA have the slightest idea what the fuck they are doing?" That one was my favorite, and the only one they didn't answer. So maybe they don't.

Pan