



# Motorcycle Riders Foundation Motorcycle Statistics Fact or Fiction?

**Analysis** A number of inconsistencies and erroneous conclusions have been uncovered in examining recent data related to motorcycle crashes and fatalities published by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), as well as by news outlets reporting on such data. If the information is presented in a questionable manner, then the theories and conclusions derived from the information is also questionable.

**Solution** Since much of the data is incomplete and without context, the conclusions based upon that data are flawed. The only true solutions to motorcycle safety are proactive measures, which prevent a collision from occurring at all, rather than reactive steps that may or may not offer some level of injury mitigation only after a crash has already taken place. Rider education, which prepares the motorcyclist to interact with other roadway users by learning and practicing the skills necessary for hazard avoidance and developing a strategy to deal with real world traffic, is the primary component of a comprehensive motorcycle safety plan. Additionally, educating all motor vehicle operators to be alert and free of impairment as they share the road with others is critical in deterring crashes caused by inattention.

## Training and Awareness are the Keys...

Examples of how the motorcycling community works to address and implement these measures are as follows:



**Lobby** for state legislated rider education programs and work with state program coordinators to develop, promote and improve training courses.

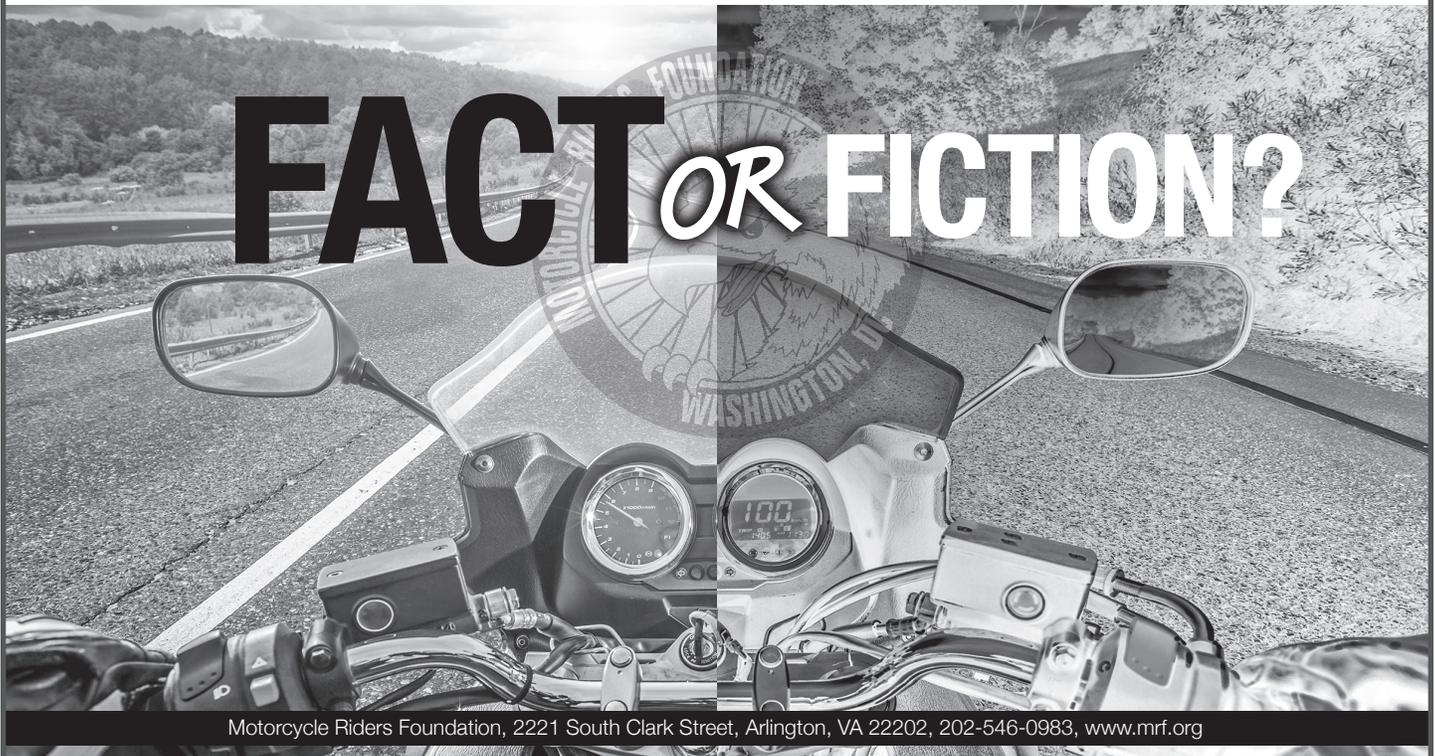
**Present** "Share the Road" programs to driver education classes, civic and social organizations and public meetings.

**Introduce** "Right of Way" legislation that provides prosecutors more opportunities in cases where a motorist's negligence causes injury or death to another.

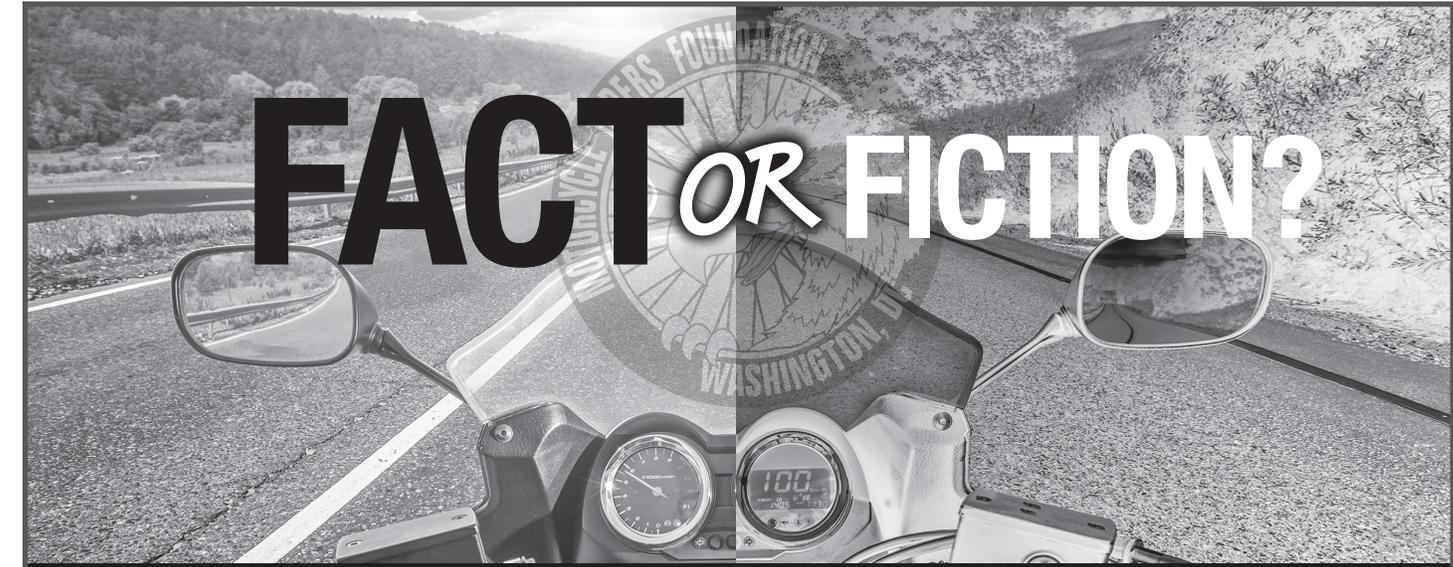
**Create** Motorcycle Safety and Awareness Month to remind all motor vehicle operators of motorcyclists' presence on the road.

**Deliver** "Ride Straight" messages within the motorcycling culture encouraging everyone to ride and drive free of impairments.

For more information contact the Motorcycle Riders Foundation, 202-546-0983, [legislative@mrf.org](mailto:legislative@mrf.org)



Motorcycle Riders Foundation, 2221 South Clark Street, Arlington, VA 22202, 202-546-0983, [www.mrf.org](http://www.mrf.org)



# FACT OR FICTION?

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**Incomplete Data** When the authors of a report put forth only some of the data available to them, while ignoring additional important data on the subject of the report, it calls into question the integrity of the results of that report. None of these facts are intended to argue against motorcycle helmet use, but rather to demonstrate that a mandatory motorcycle helmet law is not the quintessential solution to motorcycle safety.

**Fact** While many point to the recent rise in motorcycle fatalities as proof that the U.S. needs stricter motorcycle helmet laws, there is no evidence to support this premise. For the past two years, traffic fatalities as a whole have been on the rise. According to NHTSA, motorcycle fatalities rose 5.1% between 2015 and 2016. However, their same data shows that motor vehicle fatalities as a whole rose by 5.6%. Like motorcyclists, passenger car occupant fatalities rose 5.1% between 2015 and 2016. SUV occupant fatalities rose by 5.2%, and van occupant fatalities rose by 8.4%. Despite this rise in fatalities for car, SUV, and van occupants, no one is suggesting that we implement helmet laws for the operators and occupants of cars, SUVs and vans. Why are such suggestions being made with regard to motorcyclists?

**Fact** Despite assertions to the contrary, there is no evidence to suggest that the presence or absence of mandatory motorcycle helmet laws had any discernible impact on motorcycle fatalities in 2016. In its latest publication concerning motorcycle crashes, NHTSA analyzed motorcycle traffic fatalities for the year 2016. There were 5,286 motorcycle related fatalities in 2016. 2,102 of those fatalities occurred in the 19 states that have a mandatory motorcycle helmet law, as well as in the District of Columbia. 3,184 fatalities took place in the 31 states that either allow adults to choose whether or not to wear a motorcycle helmet, or simply have no law whatsoever on the matter. When we factor in motorcycle registrations we get a more accurate depiction of what those numbers mean. Of the 8,679,380 motorcycles registered in the United States in 2016, 5,199,042 were registered in states that allow adults to make their own choice when it comes to wearing helmets. The other 3,480,338 motorcycles were registered in states that have a mandatory helmet law. That means that the fatality rate per 100,000 registered motorcycles was 60.39 in states with mandatory motorcycle helmet laws, while the fatality rate per 100,000 registered motorcyclists in the states that allow adults to make their own choice was 61.24. That is a less than one percent difference in motorcycle fatality rates between the two groups of states.

**Fact** There is reason to doubt the veracity of the numbers cited in the latest NHTSA report on motorcycle traffic fatalities, at least when it comes to motorcyclists using the roads and highways on a regular basis. The report starts off by stating that “[F]or the purposes of this fact sheet, motorcycles include two- or three-wheeled motorcycles, off-road motorcycles, mopeds, scooters, mini bikes, and pocket bikes.” Data from accidents involving off-road motorcycles, mopeds, scooters, mini bikes, and pocket bikes, should not be used in any serious study of motorcycle fatalities, nor should such data be cited in any serious discussion on ways to reduce motorcycle traffic fatalities; doing so would be comparable to using data from fatalities involving four-wheelers and go-carts to formulate safety strategies for our nation’s highways.

**Fact** Historically, NHTSA has published data on motorcycle crashes and fatalities in a subtly but importantly different way than it has on data concerning motor vehicle crashes and fatalities as a whole. For instance, in its overview of fatal motor vehicle crashes published in October of 2017, NHTSA reported that there were 37,461 people killed in crashes on U.S. roadways during 2016, which was an increase from 35,485 in 2015. They went on to point out that the 5.6-percent increase in motor vehicle fatalities in 2016 is lower than the 8.4-percent increase from 2014 to 2015. No such language appears in NHTSA’s publication concerning 2016 motorcycle fatalities, despite the fact that the 5.1% increase in motorcycle fatalities in 2016 is lower than the 8% increase in motorcycle fatalities from 2014 to 2015.

**Fact** Fatalities due to alcohol impairment are an overall traffic safety problem, not just a motorcycle problem. Because NHTSA issues a yearly report which focuses only on motorcycle fatalities and injuries, it is easy for people to point to that yearly report and conclude that certain factors which contribute to traffic fatalities are unique to motorcyclists. Nothing could be further from the truth. For instance, in its latest report on motorcycle traffic fatalities, NHTSA reports that 25% of motorcyclists involved in a fatality in 2016 were alcohol impaired. They claim that it is the highest percentage of any other vehicle classification. Yet in its overview of fatal motor vehicle crashes published in October of 2017, NHTSA reported that 28% of overall motor vehicle traffic fatalities in 2016 were due to alcohol impairment. That is a 5.6% increase from 2015 according to NHTSA. Passenger cars saw a 3.1% increase from 2015 in fatalities due to alcohol impaired drivers. Light utility trucks saw a 3.6% increase. Vans saw a 23.3% increase, while large trucks saw a 50.9% increase. However, between 2015 and 2016, there was only a 0.1% increase in motorcycle fatalities due to alcohol impaired drivers. The MRF believes that any traffic fatality due to alcohol impairment is one too many. However, it is important to point out that alcohol impaired driving is not a problem unique to motorcyclists.

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