

## AMA Position on Excessive Motorcycle Noise

The American Motorcyclist Association, established in 1924, has maintained a position of strong opposition to excessive motorcycle noise throughout its history. It has funded information and public relations campaigns in support of quiet motorcycle use and was the first motorsports sanctioning body in the world to regulate and reduce the sound level of racing vehicles.

The Association believes that few other factors contribute more to misunderstanding and prejudice against the motorcycling community than excessively noisy motorcycles. A minority, riding loud motorcycles, may leave the impression that all motorcycles are loud. In fact, a significant percentage of the public does not realize that motorcycles are built to federally mandated noise control standards.

Each segment of the motorcycling community -- including the riders, event organizers, retailers and distributors, original equipment and aftermarket manufacturers, law enforcement and the safety community -- must realize that it cannot single-handedly solve this problem. However, each has a role and a responsibility in achieving a solution.

Shifting blame and failing to adopt responsible policies on a voluntary basis can only result in greater prejudice and discrimination against motorcycling. The consequences of continuing to ignore this issue will likely result in excessively rigorous state and federal standards, more expensive and less attractive motorcycles, the reduction of choices in aftermarket products, abusive enforcement of current laws and other solutions undesirable to riders and the motorcycle industry.

Based on its opposition to excessive motorcycle noise, the American Motorcyclist Association recommends the following:

- All motorcyclists should be sensitive to community standards and respect the rights of fellow citizens to enjoy a peaceful environment.
- Motorcyclists should not modify exhaust systems in a way that will increase sound to an offensive level.
- Organizers of motorcycle events should take steps through advertising, peer pressure and enforcement to make excessively loud motorcycles unwelcome.
- Motorcycle retailers should discourage the installation and use of excessively loud replacement exhaust systems.
- The motorcycle industry, including aftermarket suppliers of replacement exhaust systems, should adopt responsible product design and marketing policies aimed at limiting the cumulative impact of excessive motorcycle noise.
- Manufacturers producing motorcycles to appropriate federal standards should continue to educate their dealers and customers that louder exhaust systems do not necessarily improve the performance of a motorcycle.
- Law enforcement agencies should fairly and consistently enforce appropriate laws and ordinances against excessive vehicle noise.
- The motorcycle industry and the safety community should educate customers that excessive noise may be fatiguing to riders, making them less able to enjoy riding and less able to exercise good riding skills.

### QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

**Q:** *What is "excessive noise?"*

**A:** No one likes excessive or unreasonable noise. Confusion arises because everyone has a different

definition of "excessive." Noise considered excessive in one environment may be acceptable in another. It's up to you to determine what is excessive. This determination shouldn't always be based on the rider, but rather the conditions around the rider. Some factors to consider include surroundings, time of day, traffic mix, people present, etc.

**Q:** *Why did the AMA suddenly issue this position statement?*

**A:** The AMA has fought motorcycle bans in St. Louis, Detroit, Brockton, Massachusetts, and Springfield, Illinois. The foundation for each was tied to excessive noise. More recently we have confronted proposed motorcycle prohibitions in Chicago and New York City. Motorcycle noise, again, was the justification for these proposals.

In the past several years, the AMA has spent well over \$100,000 defending lawsuits and confronting legislative prohibitions initiated by zealous legislators responding to their belief that motorcycles are too loud. In Europe, where road closures to stifle excessive noise are becoming almost commonplace, anti-tampering legislation and restrictive sound emission requirements are under serious consideration.

The position results from the Board's desire to avoid further restrictions on motorcycling. If the excessive noise problem is not addressed voluntarily, and in a timely fashion, these restrictions are inevitable. The Board agrees that failing to raise this warning, despite the potential negative reception by some, would be shirking their responsibility to AMA members and the motorcycling community.

**Q:** *If my exhaust is modified or capable of producing "excessive noise," will I be denied access to AMA or other motorcycle events?*

**A:** There are no plans to do so. However, all motorcyclists need to become more sensitive to how they affect others. The AMA has encouraged event organizers to use advertising, peer pressure and enforcement of event rules to discourage excessively loud motorcycles.

**Q:** *Why should appropriate laws and ordinances against excessive vehicle noise be fairly and consistently enforced?*

**A:** The AMA believes that if existing laws and ordinances governing excessive noise from vehicles of all types were fairly and consistently enforced, the problem of noisy vehicles would be effectively eliminated.

**Q:** *What good is it to regulate myself if others continue to make excessive noise?*

**A:** Excessive noise is not the fault of any one brand, any particular style of bike, or any single segment of the motorcycle industry. It is a community-wide problem and we all need to be part of the solution.

**Q:** *Is the AMA telling me to replace my aftermarket exhaust with an original-equipment exhaust?*

**A:** No. However, modified exhaust systems should not increase sound to an offensive level.

## **VOLUNTARY SOUND MANAGEMENT**

Rick Gray, AMA Trustee

With many rights come responsibilities. We enjoy the right to free speech in America, but that right does not entitle us to yell "Fire!" in a crowded theater. So too, the right to ride a motorcycle does not permit us to infringe on the peaceful enjoyment of life by others. Indeed, many others, including the courts, view motorcycling not as a right but a privilege. This is an important distinction because under our legal system, the government can regulate or eliminate a privilege much easier than it can restrict or cancel a right.

When we examine lessons from history, it's predictable that when a minority abuses a right or privilege the majority will react. The reaction usually takes the form of some repressive measure. Often the phrase, "I hate motorcycles" is immediately followed with "they're too loud." Reactions of this nature regularly result in bike bans and proposals to limit the modifications we can make to our motorcycles.

Activist motorcyclists throughout the world have defended themselves against such reactions, and here in the United States the AMA has spent more than \$100,000 fighting bike ban lawsuits in recent years. All too often, the measures being fought by the AMA originated in part or total because a minority of motorcyclists have not acted responsibly when it comes to noise.

Much of this predicament is not an equipment or engineering problem, but rather a behavioral problem. Some motorcycles, when operated under certain conditions, are virtually guaranteed to offend others by interfering with their right to a peaceful environment. Irresponsibly making excessive noise with motorcycle exhaust systems is tantamount to yelling "Fire," yet some do it daily.

Rather than abuse our right to ride, shouldn't we view that right as a resource to be conserved, nurtured and developed? Can we realize that "noise" has become a political problem? Shouldn't we engage in voluntary sound management through reasonable self-regulation in order to avoid the imposition of repressive regulations?

With responsible voluntary sound management, we can "soundly manage" our precious resource of motorcycling. Without it, we invite further government regulation or worse. The choice is ours.