

## Loud Pipes Risk Rights: AMA, MRF Team Up to Tackle Noise

Recognizing that noise destroys, the two largest motorcycle-rights groups agree to work together to seek solutions to the problem.

By [Art Friedman](#).



*Even events like Daytona Bike Week, which brings tens of millions of dollars into the community every year, face restrictions and [opposition](#) because of the noise they bring. The major defenders of motorcycle rights want the motorcycle community to quiet down its act.*

complaints about motorcycle noise from their constituents. The groups seeking to maintain motorcycling freedoms must devote extra energy and expend more of their limited resources to overcome this bias. They also see major motorcycle events turned away from preferred locations, parks and other facilities closed to motorcyclists, and potential benefits (such as lowered tolls, designated parking, etc.) denied because of the concern about noise. The AMA even created the "Loud pipes risk rights" to highlight and define the problem.



*Some rural residents have sought bans on motorcycles from some of the most appealing roads because of the noise we are perceived to bring. Parks and other facilities have been closed to all motorcycles because of the noise caused by*

June 30, 2003 -- Today the American Motorcyclist Association (AMA) and the Motorcycle Riders Foundation (MRF), the two largest American motorcyclist-rights organizations, issued a joint release declaring their intention to find solutions to motorcycling's noise problem.

Loud exhaust pipes, usually from replacement aftermarket exhaust systems, but occasionally from modified or defective original-equipment systems, have long been one of the most significant public-relations problems that motorcycling faces. Few have reason to realize this more than the organizations that defend motorcyclists' rights and freedoms.

These groups frequently encounter the stigma that irresponsible or unthinking riders create with excess exhaust noise when the organizations are addressing other matters. Legislators and regulators often have a bias against motorcycles and motorcyclists because of the stream of

To begin addressing this issue, the [American Motorcyclist Association](#) (AMA) held a "National Summit on Motorcycle Sound" in May, inviting all interested parties (except the press), to air their views and offer ideas and comments. Though we did not attend, we have heard from those who did that there was agreement by most of those present that noise does indeed pose a major threat to motorcycling and that the motorcycling community needs to take action to abate motorcycle exhaust noise. The dissenters, reportedly members of some smaller rights groups, offered the "loud pipes save lives" argument, although safety researchers at the Summit reportedly produced research that shows that is not true, and that just the opposite appears to be the case -- that bikes with modified exhaust systems crash more frequently. The release distributed at the close of the Summit said that the noise issue would continue to be the focus of attention, but offered no specific action plan.

Today, the first step to addressing the problem was revealed in the following release, distributed by both the American Motorcyclist Association and the [Motorcycle Riders Foundation](#):

*"A JOINT STATEMENT FROM THE AMA AND THE MRF*

*"The American Motorcyclist Association (AMA) and the Motorcycle Riders Foundation (MRF) share a common goal of protecting the best interests of American*

*those with loud pipes.* motorcyclists and have a long history of working together toward that goal.

"At the National Summit on Motorcycle Sound, held May 16-18 in Worthington, Ohio, the AMA and the MRF joined others from the motorcycling community -- including representatives from rider groups, motorcycle manufacturers, aftermarket companies, event organizers, law enforcement, municipal government, research institutions and regulatory agencies -- in candid and open discussions on issues related to motor-vehicle noise.

"The AMA and the MRF, along with others present at the conference, agreed that excessive motorcycle noise is a serious issue in some communities, that it may become an issue in many more, and that the potential exists for it to affect motorcyclists' rights nationwide.

"Based on discussions at that conference, the AMA and the MRF have agreed to work together, with the support of other organizations and individuals within the motorcycling community, to seek solutions to this problem in the best interests of American motorcyclists. The AMA and the MRF ask for the support of their members, and of all motorcyclists, in this effort.



"The American Motorcyclist Association, founded in 1924, is a non-profit organization with more than 260,000 members. The Association's purpose is to pursue, protect and promote the interests of motorcyclists, while serving the needs of its members. For more information, visit the AMA website at [www.AMADirectlink.com](http://www.AMADirectlink.com) or call 1-800-AMA-JOIN.



"The Motorcycle Riders Foundation, the first motorcyclists' rights organization to establish a full-time legislative advocacy in Washington D.C., is the only organization in Washington devoted exclusively to the street rider. The MRF established MRFPAC in the early 1990s to advocate the election of candidates who would champion the cause of rider safety and rider freedom. The MRF proudly claims state motorcyclists' rights organizations and the very founders of the American rider rights movement among its leading members. Motorcyclists worldwide can thumb-start their search for riders' rights and safety on the web at [www.mrf.org](http://www.mrf.org) or by calling 1-202-546-0983."

## COMMENTARY

At the most basic level, this is a call to motorcyclists to stop using loud pipes. We hope that riders who care about motorcycling and the effects of noise on other people will do just that. Of course, the issue is more complex than that. It involves the loud-pipe manufacturers (that is, virtually any aftermarket manufacturer of pipes for street bikes), motorcycle manufacturers (some of which, such as Harley-Davidson and Yamaha, sell loud cruiser pipes themselves, calling them "racing" parts), motorcycle dealers, legislators and regulators, law enforcement, and the courts.



*Few straight-through pipes can make a wide spread of power equivalent to a typical stock system, and they*

Manufacturers of loud pipes say that's what customers want and that if they sell quiet pipes, they'll die. Some even seem to brag about how loud their pipes are. But we can't recall any of them ever trying to build and actively market a quiet system based on its performance and appearance. In the last 30 years, only one aftermarket pipe provided to us for evaluation has ever included markings stating that it meets applicable laws.

Besides not encouraging (or selling) loud pipes, motorcycle manufacturers can do more to make stock exhaust systems affordable when they need to be replaced. There are also appearance and customizing issues that they could address.

Motorcycle dealers, the only real contact the industry has

*certainly can't do it without being much noisier than law or courtesy requires.*



*You can get the style of pipes like these without the noise, but pipe makers say the public won't buy them.*

with riders, rarely attempt to educate customers who want loud exhaust systems about the problems they create or to discourage them, reasoning that they will just purchase them elsewhere.

We believe the key is in the language of the laws and regulations themselves. Legislators write laws that are hard to enforce. Instead of basing the requirements on the actual equipment, they tend to specify sound levels, but those are hard to measure properly and require enforcement agencies to buy the necessary equipment and train personnel in its use. If legislators started by requiring exhaust system to bear the same markings found on stock pipes that show they meet

EPA sound-level requirements as well as a measured noise standard, it would be easier for police to enforce. It would also give aftermarket exhaust manufacturers reason to start creating legal systems. We believe that this would be the most effective tactic.



*Equipping police with decibel meters like this is not a great solution, because accurate sound measurements require a controlled environment.*

At the moment, many law-enforcement agencies find their hands tied. They cite a motorcyclists for an obviously loud exhaust, but in court they lose because the wording of laws makes the standard unclear or the measurement requirements too difficult. The courts work with the wording of the law, often in opposition to the desire of the legislators and public. The cop who brings a real noise offender to court may find himself being criticized by the court because he doesn't meet the letter of the badly-written law.

The Environmental Protection Agency has standards for exhaust systems and noise but does not enforce them past the original-equipment level, even though there are provisions for penalizing those who install non-compliant exhaust systems.

Another component to the noise issue is that legislators or regulators may respond to complaints of motorcycle noise by lowering the permitted noise levels of stock motorcycles. This does nothing to solve the actual problem, but it makes new bikes more expensive, heavier, and actually makes matters worse because more owners put on loud systems to give it "a little bit of growl." Some feel that current noise requirements are too restrictive for this very reason.

We in the motorcycle press are also to blame. We routinely show bikes with modified exhaust systems and rarely point out that the machine is so loud that all of the owner's neighbors for blocks around must have contemplated taking a contract out on him. We tend to praise the looks of a custom bike without remarking that it didn't need to be loud to get those sexy exhaust lines. Even our exhaust-system comparisons probably don't state firmly enough how anti-social and damaging loud pipes are to motorcycling. The cruiser segment is the largest offender in the noise issue, so we in particular have a long way to go.

Of course, there are those ostriches in the motorcycle community who don't want to accept that loud pipes are a problem or who try to convince others that loud pipes actually do save lives (show us the science or any credible data, please). Some people even think the rest of the world likes our noise, but increasingly the public is making its displeasure known and elected officials [are taking action](#). It will be better for everyone, especially ourselves, if we tackle the problem first.

This is not a simple problem to solve, but it is an important one. We are pleased to see the AMA and MRF taking the lead on this crucial issue, and we hope that the industry and concerned motorcyclists will join them in

solving the problem.

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