

# Motorcycling in the Snowy Mountains

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## **Biography**

Terry MacGregor has been a member of the NSW Police for the past 25 years and is currently a Sergeant stationed at Tumbarumba Police Station and has always had an interest in motorcycles. Soon after transferring to Tumbarumba in 1999 he noticed a gradual increase in motor cycle crashes within the Snowy Region & brought those concerns to the attention of the Local Traffic Committee.

Joanne Cheshire is currently part of the Road User Safety Unit based in the Regional Office at Wagga Wagga and is responsible for the management, development and implementation of a number of behavioural road safety programs across the region, including Motorcycle Safety. Joanne has been working in road safety since 1998 and previously working within the Community Relations area of the RTA.

## **Abstract**

Motorcycle accidents are a significant road safety problem. In Tumbarumba Shire 22%, Tumut Shire 10% and Snowy River Shire 22% of all crashes involve a motorcycle. Motorcycle riding and subsequently motorcycle crashes have gradually increased in these Shires over the last 3 years. A number of factors have contributed to these crashes, including speed, fatigue, riders not riding to the conditions, and riders not knowing the roads. The majority of riders involved in crashes are not residents of any of the three Shires.

The Project has been running for twelve months. During this time a number of achievements have been made. These include two motorcycle surveys to obtain a picture of the riders who are riding in the region and the road safety issues motorcyclists felt they faced when riding in the region. A Motorcycle Forum was held as a means to consult with those involved, in relation to the development of an action plan and to gain support for the establishment of the "Snowy Region Motorcycle Safety Group". This group consisting of representatives from Tumbarumba and Tumut Councils, Snowy Hydro, RTA, NSW and VIC Police, Motorcycle Council of NSW, NPWS and motorcyclists, meets on a monthly basis.

An email group has been formed allowing the reporting of road conditions and the provision of information on group rides occurring in the Region. The "Motorcycling in the Snowy's" brochure has been developed containing a map detailing the main motorcycling routes through the Region. Road safety audits have been conducted along these routes, and new rest area signage will be implemented naming each rest area in line with the map. The Motorcycle Council of NSW, as a result of their involvement with the group sought and received a grant from the MAA to develop strategies and resources that specifically target group riding. New town entry signs have been implemented for each village within Tumbarumba Shire, which include information on safe riding and details of rest areas within the Shire.

## **1. BODY**

The Motorcycling in the Snowy Mountains Program takes a new step in developing strategies to address a road safety issue. The program has been developed around issues identified by stakeholders including motorcyclists and uses strategies suggested by these stakeholders to

address these issues. According to motorcyclists and the Motorcycle Council of NSW this is the first time a program of this nature has been undertaken which shows a new direction in road safety practice. This program involves several stakeholders and demonstrates multi-organisation collaboration. There have been several strategies implemented which have been evaluated by stakeholders and motorcyclists throughout NSW.

## 2. STATISTICS

The first step in developing the project was to obtain a profile of crashes that were occurring in the region. It was found from this review that a number of crashes involving motorcyclists were occurring across the shires.

Motorcycle crashes make up 22% of crashes in the Tumbarumba and Snowy River Shires and 10% of crashes in the Tumut Shire. This percentage has grown every year and is continuing to grow with a higher number of crashes occurring in 2002, which included a number of fatalities. Many factors have contributed to these crashes, including speed, fatigue, riders not riding to conditions and riders not knowing the roads. The Snowy Mountains Region has been promoted widely through the motorcycle industry as a great spot for people to ride and draws a large number of riders each year.

Crash data analysis was carried out for the period January 1996 to December 2001. Data is also collected by the local Police each time a motorcycle crash occurs. Analysis of Tumbarumba, Tumut and Snowy River Local Government Areas of crashes showed the following results:

- Motorcycles were involved in 22% of all crashes within Tumbarumba and Snowy River Shires and 10% in Tumut Shire. This is well above the State average of 4%
- 133 motorcycle crashes occurred - 3 fatal, 124 injury and 6 non-casualty crashes
- The majority of crashes occurred on Sunday (31), followed by Saturday (27) and Friday (23)
- The majority of crashes occurred during the afternoon, with 44 occurring between 12-3pm and 42 crashes occurring between 3-6pm
- 108 were single vehicle crashes with 94 of these occurring on a curved alignment
- Identified factors relating to crashes included 101 crashes involving no hazardous feature and 32 involving a hazardous feature; 117 crashes occurring on sealed roads; 113 crashes occurring on a dry surface; and 73 crashes involving speed as a contributing factor
- 124 controllers were male with 38 controllers aged between 16-25 years, 25 controllers aged between 26-35 years and 66 controllers aged over 30 years
- 99 controllers were from LGAs other than where the crashes occurred

For the period January – June 2002 crash statistics show:

- Motorcycles were involved in 43% of all crashes within Tumbarumba Shire, 20% in Snowy River Shire and 24% in Tumut Shire. This is well above the State average of 4%
- 19 motorcycle crashes occurred - 2 fatal, 15 injury and 2 non-casualty crashes
- The majority of crashes occurred on Saturday (7), followed by Sunday (4)
- The majority of crashes occurred during the afternoon, with 10 occurring between 12-3pm and 3 crashes occurring between 3-6pm
- 13 were single vehicle crashes with 15 of these occurring on a curved alignment
- Identified factors relating to crashes included 12 crashes involving no hazardous feature and 7 involving a hazardous feature; 18 crashes occurring on sealed roads; 17 crashes occurring on a dry surface; and 14 crashes involving speed as a contributing factor
- 18 controllers were male with 3 controllers aged between 16-25 years, 2 controllers aged between 26-35 years and 14 controllers aged over 30 years
- 16 controllers were from LGAs other than where the crashes occurred

### **3. SURVEY**

In developing the profile further a survey was conducted in order to assess rider knowledge and experience and gain information on strategies that may assist to reduce the number of motorcycle crashes within the region. This survey was distributed to all known motorcycle rest areas in the Tumbarumba Shire. There were a total of 450 surveys distributed with 174 (39%) responding. Results included:

- 91% (158) were male with 53% (92) aged 35-50 years, and 26% (46) aged more than 50 years
- 97% (168) held a full licence with 47% (81) having held their license for more than 20 years
- 82% (142) road a motorcycle greater than 750cc
- 80% (140) ride their motorcycles occasionally in the Tumbarumba Shire with 95% (166) not residing in Tumbarumba Shire
- 44% (77) were members of motorcycle groups
- 57% (99) ride their motorcycles purely for recreational purposes
- 5% (9) have had a motorcycle crash in the Tumbarumba Shire, of these 2 respondents stated inexperience as the cause, 4 stated road conditions and 3 stated other reasons
- 67% (117) felt that the Shires could assist with improving the safety of riders in the area with 33% (57) feeling there could be nothing done
- 8% (13) felt pamphlets and posters would assist with increasing motorcyclists safety, 4% (7) felt billboards would assist, 45% (79) felt roadside signage would be of benefit, and 2% (4) stated other resources may be beneficial

### **4. MOTORCYCLE FORUM**

Once a full profile was developed a Motorcycle Forum was conducted. The forum called together stakeholders and motorcyclists who ride the roads of the Snowy Mountain region; there were 40 people in attendance. The focus of the forum was working together to develop strategies to make motorcycling safer in the Snowy Region. Discussion and the development of strategies were encouraged throughout the presentations with the final sessions of the forum being a facilitated workshop providing the group with the opportunity to address specifically identified issues.

People who attended this forum are now either members of the “Snowy Region Motorcycle Safety group” or an email group, which receives regular updates on the progress and activities of the “Snowy Region Motorcycle Safety group”. This email group expands regularly and now consists of approximately 50 motorcyclists who provide feedback and assistance for the group. The email group also provides motorcyclists with the opportunity to report on rides that may be occurring within the Snowy Mountains Region, and of hazards they have encountered when riding in the region.

#### **4.1 Snowy Region Motorcycle Safety Group**

The “Snowy Region Motorcycle Safety Group” meets on a monthly basis and consists of representatives from Tumbarumba and Tumut Councils, Snowy Hydro, South West and Southern RTA, NSW and VIC Police, the Motorcycle Council of NSW, the National Parks and Wildlife Service, and several motorcycle representatives.

The group is the backbone of all activities which occur across the three shires. They are responsible for planning and implementing any project which is undertaken. With such a keen involvement of various stakeholders the group has managed to achieve a variety of strategies from educational through to engineering. With such a keen involvement from motorcyclists it also means that the group is addressing issues identified by motorcyclists and not issues which non-motorcyclists believe to be the problem.

## 5. ACTION PLAN

From the profile and the Motorcycle Forum the “Snowy Region Motorcycle Safety Group” developed an action plan for the period September 2002-June 2004. The Action Plan will be reviewed in June 2004. Below is an outline of the goal, objectives and strategies within the plan.

**Table 1 – Strategies from “Snowy Region Motorcycle Safety Group” Action Plan**

<b>Goal:</b> To improve the safety of motorcyclists riding in the Snowy Mountains area	
<b>Objective:</b>	<b>Strategies:</b>
To improve the road environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Identify key motorcycle routes and prioritise to enable audits to be undertaken</li> <li>➤ Develop audit brief</li> <li>➤ Encourage councils to incorporate actions to reduce hazards to motorcyclists into Work Management Statements</li> </ul>
To encourage motorcyclists to stop at regrouping areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Identify current and possible future regrouping areas</li> <li>➤ Promote identified regrouping areas</li> <li>➤ Incorporate identification of motorcycle regrouping areas into council development strategies</li> </ul>
To raise motorcyclist and other road user awareness of regional hazards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Identify high risk locations and hazards</li> <li>➤ Pilot a mechanism for motorcyclists and other road users to identify hazards</li> <li>➤ Educate motorcyclists and other road users of regional hazards</li> <li>➤ Encourage the incorporation of motorcycle safety issues within the newly developed Snowy Booklet</li> <li>➤ Refer to corporate RTA regarding distribution of motorcycle safety information with motorcycle registrations and licenses</li> <li>➤ Encourage local businesses/organisations to incorporate motorcycle awareness into Safe Driving Policy</li> <li>➤ Establish links with Tumbarumba Shire Website</li> </ul>
To encourage ride organisers to raise the profile of safety on rides	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Encourage ride organisers to notify local services or planned rides</li> <li>➤ Encourage motorcyclists to consider emergency management strategies</li> </ul>

### 5.1 Map of Motorcycle Routes

One of the issues identified was that the majority of motorcyclists riding in the area were not residents of the area and therefore don't know where services and rest areas were within the region. It was decided a motorcycle map would address this issue by detailing the main motorcycling routes through the Snowy Region. This map was developed by motorcyclists for motorcyclists and highlights the main motorcycle routes, sealed and unsealed roads, fuel stops and rest areas. The map has been utilised both as a strategic planning tools as well as a prominent part of the Motorcycling in the Snowy's brochure.

### 5.2 Town Entry Signs

An initiative of the Tumbarumba Shire was to implement new town entry signs. The “Snowy Region Motorcycle Safety Group” became involved in the process by providing information to be included on the signs for motorcyclists. The signs include information on safe riding and details of rest areas within the Tumbarumba Shire.

### **5.3 Brochure**

The "Motorcycling in the Snowy's" brochure was developed and piloted with motorcyclists in January 2003. The brochure received positive feedback and created a demand for more to be developed. This led the "Snowy Region Motorcycle Safety Group" to develop another 20,000 brochures to be distributed throughout NSW.

The brochure highlights issues identified which are contributing factors of motorcycle crashes in the Snowy Region. This includes roads and gear, fatigue, regional hazards, a map marking regrouping areas, and general safe riding tips.

Brochures have been distributed to motorcyclists through:-

- organised rides such as the Snowy Ride where there will be 2500 motorcyclists participating in 2003
- known stopping points, fuel stations, tourist information centres, and retailers of motorcycles
- identified motorcycle clubs for dissemination to members
- at organised events, such as the Sydney Motorcycle Show, the Bombala Motorcycle Show, Super Bikes and the Grand Prix at Phillip Island

## **6. ROAD SAFETY AUDITS**

Road Safety Audits have been conducted along all main motorcycle routes within the region. The purpose of the audit was to identify road safety issues that affect motorcyclists on popular routes within the Snowy Mountains. The audit was conducted by three auditors that travelled the route in both directions and during both daytime and night-time periods. A motorcyclist was used for daytime runs on a motorcycle but as a car passenger/driver for night-time audits.

The audit identified a wide range of issues that relate to motorcycle safety as well as the safety of other road users. The key issues identified in the audit were:

- Inconsistent spacing and provision of guide posts and sign posting
- Insufficient delineation for the likely travel conditions to be encountered such as fog and vehicle types (that are signposted as being recommended to avoid the road)
- Insufficient signposting to advise of the presence of curves and the appropriate travel speed
- Inconsistent and misleading signposting and advisory speed signs on curves and hair-pin bends
- The presence of gaps in guard rail sections exposing ends to oncoming traffic
- Pavement roughness that is inconsistent and may unbalance a rider
- Speed limits that are considered higher than appropriate for a recreation road carrying a variety of road user and vehicle types within a National Park where wildlife could be expected
- Extensive sections of chain wire fencing with questionable post-rigidity
- Misleading sections of road alignment that lead a rider along a route inconsistent with the road alignment
- The presence of installations of guard rail with "fish tail" end treatments
- Obstructions within a clear zone that are inconsistent with adjacent areas i.e. trees and boulders that are much closer than sections of adjacent approaches
- Guide and snow post installations that do not meet the construction standard.

### **6.1 Rest Area Signage**

Another issue identified by motorcyclists was the lack of rest area signage and also the fact that if there was a sign it still didn't state what rest area it was. When compiling the profile it

was discovered that the majority of the crashes occurring in the region was the person at the back of the pack trying to catch up. To address this issue all rest areas within the region will now be signposted and will state the name of the rest area. These rest areas are also named and marked on the motorcycle map. This will enable motorcyclists to organise to meet at designated rest areas and will take away the need for the person trailing behind to feel they have to catch up.

## **7. GROUP RIDING PROJECT**

The Motorcycle Council of NSW worked with the “Snowy Region Motorcycle Safety Group” to apply to the MAA to receive a grant to develop strategies and resources to target group riding. This project builds on work already undertaken by the NSW Motorcycle Council in conjunction with other community stakeholders in the Snowy Mountains region of NSW to address the issue of safe riding in mountainous country. As mentioned previously motorcycle crashes in the Snowy Mountains are unique as they are all single vehicle accidents, involving older riders that do not reside in the region. Nearly all of the crashes have involved motorcyclists riding in groups and it would appear that it is the person at the back of the pack trying to catch up with the rest that is involved in the crash.

The aim of the Group Riding Project was to develop material to raise motorcyclists’ awareness of their responsibilities when riding in the region. In designing this material information that has been collected to date as well as other research that has been undertaken on motorcycle safety has been utilised. The material will be developed with the intention that it can be adapted for use by other agencies in areas where there are high levels of recreational motorcycle riding.

The aim is to develop materials that will target riding in groups. Riders have to be aware that within a group there are varying degrees of skill, experience, local knowledge of the road, bike capacity, and fatigue. All riders have a responsibility to ensure that others are able to ride within their capabilities.

It is expected that this project will result in:

- the development of countermeasures to specifically address motorcycle crashes of riders riding in groups
- a safety program that will address the issues of riders riding in groups and which raises awareness of other drivers
- a project that will easily be transferred to other regions with similar issues

The countermeasure document targeting group riding has been produced in draft format. It is envisaged to have other materials finalised for the next riding season which commences in October.

## **8. EVALUATION OF PROJECT**

A second survey was conducted recently to obtain information on what other strategies could be implemented. This survey was distributed via the Snowy Ride newsletter with a total of 1000 surveys distributed with 185 (19%) responding. Results included:

- 90% were male with 97% aged more than 30 years
- 76% have held their license for more than 15 years, with 40 % being born again riders. Of the born again riders 43% have been riding for less than 5 years, 38% for 5-10 years, and 20% had been riding for more than 10 years
- 77% ride their motorcycles occasionally in the Snowy Mountains
- When riding in the region 59% ride alone or in a group and 55% ride in organised group rides

- 65% of riders travel between 200-400km in a day, with 27% of riders travelling between 400-600km in a day. 48% of riders stop more than 3 times in a day

A small evaluation of the overall activities of the “Snowy Region Motorcycle Safety Group” was also carried out in April 2003 to gain whether motorcyclists are aware of the activities of the group. This evaluation was done via an email survey. A total of 95 motorcyclists were contacted with 20 (21%) responding. Results included:

- 90% of respondents were aware of the project
- 80% had not seen the motorcycle safety group brochure
- 45% could list activities the “Snowy Region Motorcycle Safety Group” have done

Since this evaluation the motorcycle safety brochure has been produced and distributed on mass through a variety of sources. It is endeavoured to undertake a full evaluation of the project during this financial year along with a review of the Action Plan which concludes in June 2004.

### **References**

RTA, Statistics 1996-2001  
NSW Police Force, Statistics 1996-2001  
VIC Roads (2002), Make Motorcycling Safer

### **Keywords**

Motorcycles, Snowy Mountains, Snowy Region Motorcycle Safety Group