

Development Department Research Programme

Evaluation of Bikesafe Scotland

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Bikesafe Scotland is a multi-agency initiative aimed at reducing the number and severity of crashes involving motorcyclists in Scotland. The Scottish Executive and the Scottish Road Safety Campaign commissioned research to evaluate the initiative. The research involved a before-and-after survey of motorcyclists who took part in the Bikesafe Scotland Assessed Ride programme between mid-June and late-September 2002. A separate survey was carried out with people who took part in Bikesafe in 2001. Desk-based analysis of accident statistics was carried out to examine trends in motorcycle accidents in Scotland. Finally, the researchers conducted a series of in-depth telephone interviews with representatives from the organisations involved in running Bikesafe Scotland and with stakeholders from the motorcycle industry.

Main Findings

- The number of motorcyclists killed or injured on Scotland's roads fell in the early 1990s but has increased again since 1997. Older motorcyclists, aged over 30, account for an increasing proportion of casualties.
- Approximately 1,769 assessed rides have been carried out in the three years since the launch of Bikesafe Scotland in 2000. The scheme does seem to be successful in attracting 'vulnerable' groups of motorcyclists, such as 'born again bikers' (those aged over 30 years) and riders who passed their test through the Direct Access scheme.
- The research indicates that participants do find the Bikesafe Assessed Ride programme useful, and that participating has a beneficial impact in terms of improving participants' control over their bikes and encouraging them to ride defensively.
- However, there was evidence to suggest that some participants may be riding faster in some situations after taking part in Bikesafe. It may be that some participants are engaging in 'risk compensation' – they feel that they have become better riders, and are therefore better equipped to ride at speed.
- It was suggested that Bikesafe might be improved by focusing on attitudes to riding, and by further promotion of the advanced training message by Bikesafe organisers.

Introduction

The Bikesafe Scotland initiative grew out of concern at the rising numbers of motorcycle accidents in Scotland. Its basic aim is to reduce the number and severity of crashes involving motorcyclists, both locally and nationally. It also seeks to address some of the difficulties associated with the increase in 'born again bikers' – that is, motorcyclists in their late 30's and 40's who are either taking up motorcycling later in life or returning to motorcycling after a long break. It enables these bikers to have their skills reassessed before they return to riding.

The initiative was launched in 2000, and, to date, its main component has been the Police Assessed Ride programme. The Assessed Ride programme offers free on-the-road assessments of motorcycling skills from trained police motorcyclists to all holders of a full motorcycling licence in Scotland. The initiative is run by all eight Scottish Police forces in collaboration with the British Motorcyclists Federation (BMF) and the Motorcycle Action Group (MAG). Black Horse Finance also provides advice and sponsorship for the initiative, and the Scottish Road Safety Campaign assists with publicity support.

Bikesafe Scotland is currently scheduled to run until the end of 2004. NFO Social Research, in collaboration with Professor Steve Stradling of Napier University's Transport Research Institute, was commissioned in mid-2002 to evaluate the initiative. The research assessed its effectiveness in improving motorcyclists' attitudes to road safety and their riding behaviour. It is also intended to provide guidance on the future format of education and publicity initiatives aimed at motorcyclists.

The research had five main components: desk-based analysis of accident statistics; a self-completion before-and-after survey of 2002 Assessed Ride participants; a separate postal survey of motorcyclists who had assessed rides in 2001; in-depth telephone interviews with representatives from the organisations involved in running Bikesafe, and in-depth telephone interviews with stakeholders from the motorcycle industry.

Motorcycle Accidents in Scotland

The number of motorcyclists killed or injured on Scotland's roads fell in the early 1990s but has increased again since 1997. In 2001, there were 1,174 motorcycle casualties in Scotland – the highest number since 1992.

Older motorcyclists, aged over 30, account for an increasing proportion of casualties. While 30-39 year olds accounted

for just 14% of all motorcycle casualties in 1991, by 2001 they accounted for 35%.

While over half of motorcycle accidents occur in built-up areas, the proportion of accidents in non-built up areas is increasing. Further, accidents in non-built up areas are more likely than accidents in built-up areas to be fatal or serious.

Profile of Participants in Bikesafe Scotland

Approximately 1,769 assessed rides have been carried out in the three years since the launch of Bikesafe Scotland in 2000. The 2002 pre-course survey of Bikesafe participants showed that 67% fall into the 35-44 and 45-54 year-old age groups. Twenty-nine per cent of respondents were aged 35 or older when they obtained a full motorcycle licence, while around a fifth had returned to riding in the last five years after a break in riding of a year or more. This suggests that Bikesafe is attracting some riders who might be classed as 'born again bikers'.

Forty-three per cent of respondents had gained their motorcycle licence through the Direct Access scheme, which allows riders aged over 21 years to ride a bike of any size once they pass their test.

Views on the Assessed Ride Programme

Almost 100% of respondents to the 2002 post-course survey and the survey of 2001 participants said that they found the Bikesafe Scotland Assessed Ride programme 'very' or 'fairly useful'. The vast majority 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they would recommend the scheme and that all bikers should be encouraged to go on it.

There was some suggestion, however, that the assessed ride was not long enough. A fifth of respondents 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' with the statement "the assessed ride took just the right amount of time", while a similar proportion 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that it "was not long enough to learn much".

Lack of resources was seen as a major problem for the Assessed Ride programme by qualitative interviewees (both representatives of the organisations who run Bikesafe Scotland and stakeholders from the motorcycle industry). This in turn made improving publicity to attract greater numbers difficult. Interviewees also expressed concern about whether Bikesafe encourages participants to take

further training, and whether it is successful in reaching key target groups. While it was suggested that Bikesafe does attract 'born again bikers', it was seen as less successful in attracting sports bike riders, who were seen as particularly vulnerable to accident involvement by some interviewees.

Impact on Rider Attitudes and Behaviour

Findings on the impact of Bikesafe Scotland on the behaviour and attitudes of participants were somewhat mixed. On the one hand, there was evidence to suggest that Bikesafe has a positive impact on participants' control over their bike and their intention to ride defensively. The 2002 post-course survey showed an improvement in the proportion of respondents saying they 'never' or 'hardly ever' "brake too quickly on a slippery road" or "find your back wheel slipping away when you take a bend, almost causing you to lose control". These types of riding behaviour appear to be associated with control over the bike.

Participants also seem to *feel* that Bikesafe has a positive impact on their riding behaviour. Less than 5% of participants agreed with the statement "Bikesafe did not make any difference to the way I ride my bike" and over three quarters agreed that Bikesafe had taught them to ride more defensively.

'Loss of control' has been identified as a key precipitating factor in fatal motorcycle accidents in previous research (Lynam et al, 2001). Further, promoting defensive riding, which encompasses greater awareness of other road users and being able to anticipate and avoid potentially dangerous situations, is a key aim of Bikesafe Scotland. These findings therefore suggest that Bikesafe Scotland has some positive effects on participants' attitudes and behaviour.

In relation to riding speed, however, while the proportion of respondents saying they would normally ride *below* the speed limit in roads in built-up areas increased after participation in Bikesafe, the proportion saying they would ride at 10 or more miles *above* the speed limit on faster roads in non-built up areas also increased. Further, the proportion of post-course participants who say they often exceed the speed limit on motorways and on country roads is higher than the proportion of pre-course participants. Given that the proportion of serious and fatal motorcycle accidents is much higher in non-built up areas, findings relating to participants' speeds on these roads are cause for concern.

Potential Improvements and Issues for the Future

In terms of improving the Bikesafe scheme, the findings on speeding, discussed above, suggests that there may be a need for a greater focus on attitudes to riding as part of the Assessed Ride programme. It may be that some riders are engaging in 'risk compensation' after taking part in Bikesafe – they feel that they have become better riders and are therefore better equipped to ride at speed. Focusing on attitudes to riding as part of the course could address this issue by aiming to curb riders' confidence in their ability to ride safely at speed, and in fact several forces have already modified their Bikesafe programme to focus more on riding attitudes.

The research also found that two-thirds of 2002 Bikesafe participants said their assessor had not suggested they undertake any further training. This suggests that the advanced training message could also be better promoted by Bikesafe organisers.

Some of the stakeholders interviewed thought there might be scope to involve trainers from the private or voluntary sectors in running Bikesafe Scotland or a similar scheme. However, it was recognised that this would create various difficulties around charging, resources and the credibility of these trainers.

Interviews with stakeholders from the motorcycle industry suggested that there is some scope for involving them more in promoting and supporting Bikesafe Scotland or similar initiatives – for example, by negotiating discounts for Bikesafe participants with motorcycle retailers and insurers. This could be one way of encouraging more motorcyclists from hard-to-reach groups to attend.

There was support among interviewees for some kind of diversionary scheme for motorcyclists, similar to the Driver Improvement schemes that operate for car drivers. However, offering Bikesafe assessed rides as an alternative to prosecution was seen as problematic since it does not involve any instruction and there are already problems with limited resources. It was also felt that offering a police-run scheme as an alternative to prosecution might be seen as a conflict of interest, and that using Bikesafe in this way might deter other motorcyclists who have not committed offences from taking part.

About the Study

The study was carried out by NFO Social Research between May 2002 and January 2003. Rachel Ormston led the

research, which comprised a before-and-after self-completion survey, an additional postal survey of previous Bikesafe participants, qualitative telephone interviews, and desk-based analysis of accident statistics. 324 'pre-course' questionnaires were returned by motorcyclists who took part in Bikesafe between June and September 2002, and 111 of these respondents also returned a 'post-course' questionnaire. 167 questionnaires were returned by motorcyclists who took part in Bikesafe in 2001.

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