

# Opinion editorial

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## Too many motorcyclists dying

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Tasmania's motorcycle death and serious injury statistics, and individual examples of extraordinarily risky and dangerous rider behaviour detected by Tasmanian Police, show we have a significant road safety challenge.

This year already we have had six motorcycle deaths and 32 riders seriously injured. In 2017 there were 11 motorcycle deaths, including five interstate riders, and we should not forget the 74 riders who were seriously injured.

To really put the problem into perspective, motorcycles are 4% of registered vehicles yet this year are 42% of fatalities.

In the past five years 40 riders have been killed and a staggering 411 seriously injured.

That means hundreds of Tasmanian lives changed over the years, some of them catastrophically. And of course, the greater the speed, the greater the damage to the human body.

Helmets and protective clothing will help. But the best protection is prevention through training, education and enforcement.

For example, this week Tasmania Police are focusing on safe riding behaviour in the North-West and West – not just with enforcement but education.

Depending on your road behaviour, if you are pulled over, you may be spared a ticket, but you won't be spared some sage advice and a warning.

Driving a car or riding a motorbike is the most dangerous thing we will do each day, and when you mix inattention, inexperience and speed with the obvious vulnerability of a bike rider the consequences are dire.

The strong message is that Tasmania Police want you to be safe, they want you to understand that that in a split-second you could be a seriously injured or killed. Hopefully riders will heed that advice and think seriously about upgrading their skills.

The State Government last year substantially upgraded motorcycle training to give learners more experience. They have three times as more training to qualify for a full licence than under the old system.

As at the end of April there were 1489 learners, 1218 P1 licence holders and 1824 P2 licence holders on our roads who will be better trained and with more awareness of their skills, their limitations, and their responsibilities to themselves and other road users

The other challenge is that of the 50,239 licensed motorcycle riders in Tasmania (as of April 30), there are those who may not have been on a bike for some time and plan to get back in the saddle.

It's important to realise that inexperience doesn't just mean young riders. It can mean older riders with rusty skills and a new and more powerful bike. It can mean interstate riders of any age or years of riding who will be unfamiliar with our roads.

That challenge is also being addressed with training and education.

There is now a returning rider road refresher course open to all Tasmanian riders. It costs \$90, with the remaining \$150 subsidised by the Motor Accident Insurance Board.

This half-day course includes an off-road review of braking, steering and manoeuvring skills and an on-road coaching ride that covers multi-lane highways, narrow country roads, shopping centres and hills and bends.

The Road Safety Advisory Council website, [www.rsac.tas.gov.au](http://www.rsac.tas.gov.au), includes pages for visiting riders with sage advice in an online video from Tasmanian motorcycle champ Malcolm Campbell and a veteran rider from interstate, Lester Knowles. The lessons equally apply to local riders.

The Tasmanian Motor Cycle Council, which has strongly supported the new learner regime and the refresher course, also has practical advice for locals and visitors on its website, [www.tasmanianmotorcyclecouncil.org.au](http://www.tasmanianmotorcyclecouncil.org.au).

Any rider who wants to be safe on our roads should seriously consider the refresher course and the advice from riders who really know their stuff. Administrative changes mean it's easier to get into a course and the Department of State Growth will be contacting returning riders about the training.

The experts will tell you that riding is both physically and mentally demanding and the consequences of a mistake can be life-changing. So, the more we can build skills, the safer riders will be.

Bike riders don't have a steel shell to protect them. There have been advances in bike safety – ABS brakes, for example – and there is now bike clothing fitted with protective airbags. In fact, this gear is mandatory this year in MotoGP racing.

But the responsibility rests not just with riders.

But no matter what they ride or drive, every Tasmanian road users has a responsibility to look after not just themselves, but every road user – particularly the most vulnerable.

Garry Bailey is Chair of the Road Safety Advisory Council.