

History of ABATE in America How it all started

The following material was originally published in Easyriders magazine in the early 1970's

Street Legal Chopper Circa 1973?

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You, as an individual, can stand on your roof-top shouting to the world about how unjust, how stupid, and how unconstitutional some of the recently passed, or pending, bike laws are - but all you will accomplish is to get yourself arrested for disturbing the peace.

Individual bike clubs can go before city councils, state legislatures, and congressional committees, but as single clubs, and unprofessional at the game of politics, their efforts are usually futile. Scattered, unorganized, individual efforts have little if any effect against the power structure - it's like hunting big game with a bolt-action .22 rifle. It takes numbers to command respect, to be heard over the din created by the anti-bikers, and worse, the anti-chopper forces. The major problem is not any particular anti-bike movement or organization - the problem is that the people who make the laws are people who know nothing about bikes. The little old lady writes her congressman and complains. There is no one offering rebuttal-intelligent, professional rebuttal-to her unfair charges. The congressman, who doesn't hear any arguments against what the old lady said, but does want to please everybody and does want to get elected again, introduces a bill to ban whatever was bugging the old lady. The bikers in the area don't see the small item, buried in the back of the newspaper along with the hemorrhoid cures, announcing the proposed law for all bikes to have roll bars. Since no one sees it, no rebuttal is offered, and the law is passed. Or if it is seen, and a club or two protest, it isn't a loud enough protest, or it is a disorganized or it is a disorganized protest, or an unprofessional protest, and as a result the law is passed.

An oversimplification, yes. But that basically is the problem broken down into its simplest terms. We need a national organization of bikers. An organization united together in a common endeavor, and in sufficient numbers to be heard in Washington, D.C., in the state legislatures, and even down to the city councils. We must offer strong, organized rebuttal to all unfair legislation, no matter what the level. To stop or modify an unfair law in one state is to stop or impede it in another. If it's wrong, it's wrong, and only constant, relentless pressure will stop the trend against bikes. Today it might be Arizona, but tomorrow it might be your state. We must start now to put a stop to bad laws. We must educate the people who make the laws. We must present our side of the story, and we must present it from a position of strength, and in a professional, dignified manner. Already the Government has indicated they are going to press for national custom bike laws ("Safety Standards") for, you guessed it, our safety. The Department of Transportation has already issued printed warnings against the "danger" of extended front ends, lack of front-wheel brakes, "and other hazardous features of customized motorcycles." We're not saying they are all wrong-nobody is all wrong. But what we are saying is that we, us, you and I, bike riders. Chopper builders, chopper manufacturers, everyone with an interest in the future of bikes, must present our side, we must see to it that any laws that are passed are just. We must present our case and defend it vigorously. What can you do? Join the National Custom Cycle Association (NCCA). Let's get together in a mass, so that our voice means something, has the weight and strength of numbers.

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ABATE Membership in 44 States Have Started Working Toward Our Freedom of the Road

Originally published in the February 1972 issue of Easyriders Magazine

We are off and running, after a slight delay caused by having to change the name of our organization. It was discovered at the last moment that the NCCA name was not available for use as a non-profit corporate name-the initials being too similar to those of another corporate name. So, as long as we had to create a new name for the organization, it was decided to create a name with letters that spelled a word describing the organization's purpose. It was a bitch to do, let me tell you -try it some time. After much hassle, we came up with ABATE (which means to put an end to; to reduce in degree or intensity; to beat down; to decrease in force or intensity).

The letters stand for **A Brotherhood Against Totalitarian** (i.e., strict control by coercive measures; completely regulated by the state) **Enactments** (i.e. to make (as a bill) into law).

A mouthful, to be sure, but it lays it all out in front of God & everybody, exactly why the brotherhood was formed-to protect individual freedom of the road. Our mission is positive. We want to educate the lawmakers, to give them our side of the story, before laws are enacted, & we are devoted to working aggressively toward the abatement of all unfair, unjustified, arbitrary anti-bike laws everywhere. Our insignia is a no-nonsense, uptight eagle (see above) that represents our firm, no-bullshit, resolved to get the job done. Now, not tomorrow. We all know what our problems are, so let's get it on, rather than merely sitting around on our asses complaining about them.

Project No. 1 As members of ABATE already know, our immediate project to get all existing bike laws, state by state, county by county, city by city, into a computer. To do this, we are asking everyone, ABATE members or not, to go to your State capitals, libraries, police departments, and send us documented evidence of every bike law in your area and state. We want facts, not rumors. We also want to know what bike laws are pending, what bike laws almost passed and may be back during the next legislative session. We want names and addresses of all anti-bike and pro-bike legislators. We want to know where the speed traps are, and where the especially anti-chopper police departments are. We want to get the national problem down on paper in order to intelligently plan our cam-

paigns. ABATE members are already working on this project, and all bikers, everywhere, are urged to help us. There may be some duplicated efforts initially, but it is better that ABATE be oversupplied with information, rather than not having all of it.

Project No. 2 As reported in the last issue, ABATE and NCCSI (the chopper manufacturers association) are presently preparing a chopper to send to Washington, D.C. for the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to test. We know choppers are safe, but the only way the government is really going to know it is to test them, rather than taking some anti-biker's word for it. Rest assured that the choppers we supply the government with will be good, strong, safe choppers.

Project No. 3 ABATE needs members. Only in numbers is there sufficient strength to get the job done. To enter a fight without enough members is like hunting bear with a BB gun. It takes numbers to command respect, to be heard over the din created by the anti-bike forces, and worse, the anti-chopper forces. But we don't want just members, we want doers. We know there are only some of you who will get off your ass and do something – and we want that group as members. The battle is in 50 different states. The only way ABATE can be effective – end effective fast enough – is to have doers in every state. Not a doer, but thousands of doers.

The History of ABATE the Organization

Back in June of 1971, a new and exciting motorcycle publication was introduced--EASYRIDERS--a motorcycle magazine for the entertainment of adult bikers. This came into existence by the hard work of Lou Kimzey, the Editor, along with the owner of Paisano Publications. Along with Lou were Mil (Hog Expert) Blair, Editor-at-Large, and Joe Teresi, Senior Editor. Joe was the one who came up with the needed funding to get things running smoothly. He was owner of D&D Distributor, later known as Jammer. About the same time that EASYRIDERS got underway an organization by the name of N.C.C.S.I. (National Custom Cycle Safety Institute) got going. Joe Teresi was Vice President of this group. This organization was for manufacturers and distributors. Their main function--was to come out with their own safety standards for custom parts. They concentrated mainly on custom front ends and frames with raked necks. They are credited for keeping a lot of junk off the market and were able to keep Big Brother at arm's length. In Issue No. 3, October 1971, EASYRIDERS started a non-profit organization just for bikers. It was called NCCA (National Custom Cycle Association). At the time, dues were \$3 for a one-year membership. One must keep in mind that back in 1971 no other motorcycle magazine except Roger Hall's "Road Rider" was even giving an inch of space to anti-bike legislation. Yet Lou Kimzey saw fit to take on the extra burden of starting a motorcycle rights organization.

It wasn't long until Lou changed the NCCA to ABATE (A Brotherhood Against Totalitarian Enactments). Lou came about the Eagle logo in an old civil war publication. The eagle is one of the largest birds, and a strong flier. It has long been used as a sign of power, courage, and freedom. The American Bald Eagle is not only our logo but it is the official emblem of the United States. Its picture is on the Great Seal of the U.S., the President's flag, some coins and paper money. Our logo with the 13 star shield is truly worthy of our cause, and our founder foresight. In early 1972, Keith Ball arrived on the scene at EASYRIDERS. He became Associate Editor of EASYRIDERS and Director of ABATE. Through the work of Keith and the guidance of Lou, ABATE started area coordinators in different states to help organize bikers so that they could better represent ABATE on the local level. This also helped form a better line of communication. From this mushroomed a sophisticated network of state and county chapters.

It should be noted that the little funds that ABATE had in the early days went to hiring an engineering firm to determine whether a raked front end or an extended front end was safe. This resulted in two lengthy documented reports, complete with engineering drawings that established proof that they were safe. This allowed bikers to fight in court "unsafe vehicle" tickets with scientific facts--not just opinions. EASYRIDERS, on behalf of ABATE, also picked up the tab on a test case concerning an extended front end being unsafe. From 1971-1974 most of ABATE's efforts went into fighting such laws. Had it not been for the efforts of ABATE-EASYRIDERS in the early 1970s, choppers would have been outlawed.

In March of 1977, ABATE, through the help of the staff at EASYRIDERS, held a State Coordinators meeting in Daytona, Florida. It was decided as a matter of policy that ABATE, nationwide, as a lobbying organization would discourage back patches on cut-offs. This was decided as necessary in order not to be misjudged as a "club," either by outlaw groups, police, or Joe Citizen. At this meeting it was also decided that it was about time ABATE got organized, with a charter, bylaws, etc. Nominations were held, and five State Coordinators were elected as a steering committee to take ideas from all the members and chapters, and boil the results down to a charter and bylaws. Fuzzy Davy from ABATE of Virginia was elected spokesman of the steering committee along with Donna Oaks from ABATE of Kansas, Russell Davis (Padre) from ABATE of Pennsylvania, Wanda Hummell from ABATE of Indiana, John (Rogue) Herlihy from ABATE of Connecticut. A

meeting was set up for Labor Day at the second national ABATE get-together in Lake Perry, Kansas. This gave the new steering committee seven months to get everything together. At the Kansas meeting, Lou Kimzey could not make it because of a sudden illness. In his place he sent Keith Ball, Joe Teresi, Pat Coughlin, a union organizer, and Ron Roliff, business agent of the M.M.A. A hall was rented by EASYRIDERS so that a professional meeting could be conducted. At this meeting a proposal for a new national was presented by the people from EASYRIDERS. In this proposal was a five-member board of directors. A problem arose when it was learned that none of the board would be made up of any of the state coordinators or any ABATE people, but would be composed of people from California, led by Ron Roloff of the M.M.A. This intimidated a lot of hard working ABATE people. Also, none of the recommendations of the ABATE steering committee were considered.


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After a lot of in-fighting, the state coordinators were asked to send what they thought should be changed and to submit their ideas to Lou Kimzey. Lou had sent around a letter explaining that he was sorry that he had missed the meeting in Kansas and that he was scheduling a meeting in Sacramento in October 1977. Lou paid the air fares of the steering committee members (5), put them up in a hotel, and then attempted to explain how and why things had gotten out of hand. Unfortunately, ABATE people who had not been invited to this meeting provoked uncalled-for attacks against Lou and EASYRIDERS. Lou had tolerated a lot of mud slinging concerning forming a national organization; thus he stated to the people attending the meeting that he and EASYRIDERS were relinquishing the organization to the people attending the meeting in Sacramento.

Out of this mess two national organizations were formed: one in Sacramento; the other in Washington, D.C.; the latter being formed by all the state ABATE organizations. In March of 1978, ABATE chapters held another meeting in Daytona. The Sacramento people sent Pat Coughlin with another proposal. It was rejected by the ABATE organizations attending. 'At this meeting the ABATE chapters were told that the Sacramento group was not going to change its name (National ABATE) and was going to go on doing business as usual. It was decided that the D.C. base national that was formed by the state organizations should be dissolved, thus doing away with a lot of the hassles taking up everybody's time, and that the states should get back to doing the business they were formed to do--fight state anti- motorcycle legislation.

ABATE formed five regions in the country, each region having about 10 states. Each region has a Regional Coordinator who coordinates information between the state ABATE organizations. Each ABATE state organization is now independent and on its own. Because of all the hassles of trying to form a national organization. The trust and funds needed, the probability of another attempt at forming a nation is most unlikely. In the meantime, ABATE people all over the country are taking care of business as always, and no matter what happens, they will be there taking care of business.

Continued next month



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Continued from last month

author unknown

A Brief History Of Bikers Rights In America As seen by Bill Bish , National Coalition of Motorcyclists ABATE of California Hello! My name is Bill Bish, and I'm Executive Coordinator of the National Coalition of Motorcyclists and Aid to Injured Motorcyclists (A.I.M. and NCOM), and I've been active in bikers rights for over thirteen years, having served in various state and local positions within ABATE of California, including two terms as Chairman of the Board and two terms as State Director. A few years ago I compiled a "History of ABATE" article for our ABATE of California newsletter, the "Bailing Wire", which people must've enjoyed reading because it has since been reprinted in several newsletters and magazines. Soooo, for you history buffs, I'll try to piece together some of our early beginnings, with apologies to those who were there from the start. I wasn't, so this is only from my early conversations with people like Deacon, Ron Roloff and others who WERE there, as well as my own research and admittedly spotty memory. Through my involvement with NCOM and ABATE of California, I have had the privilege of traveling across the United States to preach unity and and spread important information, and I will always treasure my memories of the places that bikers' rights has taken me and the friendly face that have greeted me. Because our issue is so emotional and deeply personal, I have developed close relationships with many Freedom Fighters throughout the country who I am proud to call Brother and Sister. It was this deep sense of "Family" within the motorcycle rights community that inspired me to trace our family tree. Much has been said of the coming new millennium, and of the opportunities and pitfalls our future holds in store, but one thing is certain... "YOU HAVE TO KNOW WHERE YOU'VE BEEN TO KNOW WHERE YOU ARE GOING!" With that thought in mind, I'd like to take you on a brief trip down memory lane, as we open up our Family Album and retrace our History as a bikers' rights movement here in the United States:

Easyriders magazine editor Lou Kimzey issued a plea in issue #3, October 1971, for bikers to come together to fight impending restrictions from the National Highway Safety Administration (NHTSA) by joining a new national bikers' rights organization called the National Custom Cycle Association, but because of a conflict with the acronym the name was changed in February 1972 to A B brotherhood Against Totalitarian Enactments (ABATE). I recall Joe Teresi, publisher of Easyriders, telling me that they had a contest around the office to come up with a new name, and one of the secretaries came up with "ABATE". He told me they were on a deadline and needed a logo real fast.

So they took a stylized German eagle and transformed it into the logo used by many ABATE's to this day. Easyriders began granting state charters around 1974, and Keith Ball was the original national coordinator (Keith later became editor of Easyriders until his retirement). ABATE organizations which came into existence around this same time were chartered in Kansas, Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and New York; and also MMA of California, MMA of Massachusetts, New Hampshire Motorcycle Rights Organization, Rhode Island Motorcycle Association, Connecticut Motorcycle Rights Association, and the Wisconsin Better Bikers Association. Easyriders published some phone numbers and a loose knit network of bikers' rights activists began to grow.

Ron Roloff and others had already founded the Modified Motorcycle Association of California, and it's interesting to note that Easyriders' original name for their rights group was similar to MMA's because the biggest threat, aside from the original federal helmet mandates, which were instituted in 1966 by congress and later repealed in 1976, was that the U.S. DOT (Department of Transportation) was investigating ways to restrict modified or custom "choppers" which were deemed unsafe, especially extended forks. Deacon, founder of ABATE of California, once related to me that the 60's fad of ridiculously high sissy bars came about because the government started requiring "grab bars" for passenger safety, so the riders of the day flaunted the law by building them as long and garish as they could get away with. Almost every state during this time passed handlebar height restrictions, mandatory eye protection, motorcycle licensing requirements, light on laws and other equipment regulations, and many other restrictions on our "Freedom Machines" were being considered by legislators and bureaucrats to make motorcycling "safer". In most states, before motorcyclists became politically organized, the clubs were the first to fight helmet laws and other restrictions. As the rights movement grew, Don Pittsley, a member of the Huns M/C in Connecticut convinced his congressman, Rep. Stewart McKinney, to introduce H.R. 3869 to end the Federal authority to withhold highway funds from states without helmet laws (i.e., the "National Helmet Law"). In July of 1975, Rob Razor of the American Motorcyclist Association (AMA), Ron Roloff of the MMA of California and Ed Armstrong of ABATE of Chicago presented the House Sub-Committee on Surface Transportation with convincing

testimony to repeal the helmet mandates.

Later that year, with California being sued by the DOT because Governor Ronald Reagan refused to comply with the federal helmet law mandate, Roloff helped convince California Senator Alan Cranston to offer the language of the bill as an amendment to the 1975 Federal Highway Act, which passed with overwhelming support from the California delegation because of the impending lawsuit, and was signed by president Gerald Ford on May 5, 1976. Not bad for a rag tag bunch of bikers with little or no previous political ambitions. Spurred on by many successful protest rallies around the country following the national helmet law repeal, and the eventual repeal of more than 30 state helmet laws, ABATE, MMA and other motorcycle rights organizations sprang up in every state and are now a fixture in Capitols across America. Following several failed attempts to start a national motorcycle rights organization, including Easyriders giving up the reigns of National ABATE, in 1985 the Motorcycle Riders Foundation (MRF) hosted their first Meeting of the Minds conference, and less than a year later, in 1986, the National Coalition of Motorcyclists (NCOM) held their first National Convention. Motorcycling leaders nationwide realized the need for a united voice and the necessity of networking and communicating with each other, and both the MRF and NCOM grew and have become effective partners with state MRO'S in protecting riders' rights on the federal, state and local fronts.

The concept of unity was put to the test in the early 1990's, when Congress again attempted to force states into passing helmet laws, and American motorcyclists came together en masse, and in a coordinated effort between the MRF and NCOM virtually every state sent representatives from their MRO (Motorcycle Rights Organization) to walk the hallowed halls of Washington, D.C., in search of their U.S. Senators and Representatives. The grand lobbying experiment WORKED, and in just FOUR YEARS bikers were able to persuade Congress in 1995 to once again repeal their misdirected and misguided "nanny" law and return the decision to the individual states. That same federal transportation legislation also repealed the national 55 mph maximum speed limit! Soon afterwards, Arkansas modified their mandatory helmet law to allow Freedom of Choice for adult riders 21 and older. Texas soon followed, as well as Kentucky and, most recently, Louisiana. As a result of our newfound political clout, motorcyclists have successfully approached Congress twice over the past few years, first to grant federal protections against insurance discrimination based on mode of transportation because many companies (most notably Ruger Firearms and the Teamsters Union) were denying medical benefits to employees injured in motorcycle accidents.

Then, just last session (1998), motorcyclists united to put together a pro-active agenda for bikers, and succeeded in lobbying it through Congress; included in this "wish list" for bikers was a guarantee that motorcyclists would be included during the development of the Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) technology; ensures that motorcycles are guaranteed access to any and all roads built with the use of federal highway funds (no road bans) ; restricts anti-motorcycle lobbying efforts by NHTSA and shifts their focus from injury prevention to accident prevention; and provides \$131 million for recreational trails development and maintenance!

During this same time, many state rights groups have become proactive within their states instead of RE-acting to legislative threats. Minnesota passed our nation's first law to make it illegal to discriminate against someone because they ride a motorcycle; Arizona, Iowa, Oregon and Washington have successfully repealed or modified their state's handlebar height law; Virginia and Illinois have lobbied their states to reinforce the federally guaranteed access to roads by passing laws to protect our rights to ride on any roads within their state boundaries; and several states have fought and defeated so-called "No Fault" insurance proposals that are unfair to motorcyclist. Also, now, through the work of the National Coalition of Motorcyclists, patch holders in 33 states have come together to form Confederations of Clubs to fight discrimination and police harassment judicially through the Courts... bringing the motorcycle rights network full circle with the rejuvenated interest of the motorcycle club community. While our early bikers' rights leaders paved our way, other dynamic and concerned riders have stepped forward to take the reigns and lead us into the 21st Century.

But we should never forget the efforts and sacrifices of our predecessors who faced intimidation from law enforcement, indifference from legislators and animosity from a public that saw "The Wild One" one too many times. Yet they got the job done, and were it not for their perseverance and dedication, we would not have become the respected and effective grass roots lobbying group that we are today.

So, there you have it. The roots of ABATE and bikers' rights run deep in the hearts of those of us who have accepted and, in turn, passed on the torch of Freedom of the Road. To all of those who came before, we salute you! Where will the future take us? That's entirely up to you... But, I'd like to leave you with a quote from Margaret Mead; "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it is the only thing that has." Bill Bish AIM/NCOM