

Bruce on Bikers' Rights

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September 2007

HOW DO WE GET CAGERS TO HANG UP AND DRIVE?

One Hundred Dollars for the Best Idea



In last month's "Hang Up and Drive!" installment, I pointed out that there are currently 236 million cell phone subscribers on our roadways ... that 73% of them are talking while they are driving ... that cell phone conversations impair their driving skills as much if they were intoxicated with alcohol... and that consequently they are four times more likely to cause or be involved in an accident than motorists who responsibly shut up and steer. And for those of you who discount these statistics--or for whatever reason refuse to accept the fact that *cell phone conversation-impaired cagers* are one of the greatest and growing threats to the safety of American motorcyclists--I relate the following:

Saturday, 11 August 2007, marked the end of eleven days and 5,921 miles in the saddle for me. I rode 2,365 miles from Miami Beach, Florida to Gillette, Wyoming, which was my base for this year's **Sturgis Motorcycle Rally**. From there, I rode another 1,135 miles touring through the scenic Black Hills, Badlands and Big Horn Mountains of Wyoming, South Dakota and Montana. I then logged another 2,421 miles of saddletime returning home. I was very fortunate to be able to complete this annual pilgrimage, as I NEARLY LOST MY LIFE 3 TIMES IN THE FIRST 36 HOURS OF THE RIDE. And no, I was not assaulted by Al Qaeda or run down by drunken undocumented workers, so deporting Mohammed or Pedro would not have eliminated the threat. The guilty parties who violated my right-of-way, and almost caused me to crash three times in the first fifteen hundred miles of my ride to Sturgis, were CAUCASIAN CAGERS IMPAIRED BY CELL PHONE CONVERSATIONS.

Incident #1. Early Wednesday morning, 1 August 2007, I was riding alone northbound going about 70 mph in the left of three lanes of the Florida Turnpike just above the Broward County line. The middle lane was empty, and just a nose ahead of me in the right lane was a typical soccer mom's oversized gas-guzzling SUV. For no apparent reason, the dark-colored SUV started drifting left. As it did so, I observed that the driver was a 30-ish white female with a cell phone glued to her ear, obviously paying no attention to what lane she was in, and oblivious to the fact that she was on a collision course with me. I hit both brakes and sounded my enhanced H-D horns, which startled her out of her conversational impairment just in time to swerve back to the right and out of my lane. Realizing she had just missed sideswiping me by less than two feet, she mouthed an "OOPS!" and waved her now empty right hand. I replied with a message and gesture that were somewhat less cordial, but clearly understood.

Incident #2. Around 10:00am Thursday morning, 2 August 2007, I was heading eastbound on I-24 through southern Illinois, approaching its terminus at I-57. I was riding drag on the right in a tight formation of four bikes going about 75 mph in the left lane as we attempted to pass a semi and the van and car behind it. The two lead bikes were about half-way even with

the dark red high-profile Dodge delivery van when its driver apparently decided he wanted to pass the semi as well. He did not bother to use his turn signals or look to see what might be in the lane to the left of him. All four of us riders slammed on our brakes as the van just kept coming left, missing the right lead bike by inches. The van proceeded to pass the semi, with our four bikes behind him now, and then pulled back into the right lane. We sped up, and when I came alongside him, I saw the driver was a 40-ish white male, yakking away into his large white cell phone. He gave no acknowledgment to my communication of displeasure, and I don't think he even realized what he had just done. *He just kept on talking.* I bet if this clown had taken out a solo rider he would not have stopped, and the state troopers would've reported to the media that the rider died because he "lost control of his motorcycle".

Incident #3. Early in the afternoon of Thursday, 2 August 2007, I was riding alone eastbound on I-70, approaching the exit to I-435 in Kansas City, Missouri. I was going about 65 mph in the right lane of the interstate, coming around a white dually pulling a trailer full of farm equipment on the left. I was about even with the front of the trailer when the truck's right turn signal started blinking and the dually started coming hard over into my lane. I quickly geared down and opened up my throttle to shoot through a narrowing slot of safety, and made it with a margin of just a second or two. I then looked back into the truck's cab, and sure enough the gray-haired Caucasian male behind the wheel was holding a cell phone to his right ear, only belatedly realizing how close he'd come to clipping me with his right front fender.

These are not the first "close calls due to cellphone calls" I have reported to you. But my concern is not with the incidents I (and others, perhaps you) have survived. My concern is the incident that I (or others, perhaps YOU) may *not* survive. So I ask you:

HOW DO WE GET CAGERS TO HANG UP AND DRIVE?

We can lobby for laws banning the use of cell phones while driving, but how long will it take to get those laws on the books, how many motorcyclists will be maimed or killed in the interim, and how effective will they be in the end? Most of the laws passed to date ban only the use of hand-held devices and exempt hands-free technologies, but studies show that it is *the conversation and not the device* that distracts and impairs the driver. These laws also tend to have minimal penalties and be difficult to enforce, so many drivers simply ignore them:

<http://tinyurl.com/2wxpya>

Lobbying for laws banning the use of cell phones while driving certainly increases public awareness of the issue, but passing "feel good" laws that are painless to defy will not make our roads any safer. There will always be those who still "talk and drive", just like there will always be those who still "drink and drive". So, given that cell phone call impairment has the same effect as alcoholic intoxication, perhaps a more equitable and effective legislative route might be to amend our DUI laws to apply the same penalties for DWI ("Driving While Inattentive"):

<http://tinyurl.com/3btoc7>

Here again, though, I wonder how long will it take to amend the DUI laws, how many motorcyclists will be maimed or killed in the interim, and how effective will the DWI amendments be in the end? Like I said, there will always be those who will “drink and drive”, and there will always be those who will “talk and drive”. So once more, I ask you:

HOW DO WE GET CAGERS TO HANG UP AND DRIVE?

Statehouse politicians and safetycrats may someday give us a solution, but what can bikers do to seek *our own* solution? I believe it is time for American motorcyclists to defend our right to ride, and to safely share the road. I believe it is time for us to TAKE THIS ISSUE TO THE STREETS, and to develop both organizational programs and individual plans of action that will mitigate the inattentive blindness of cackling cagers by increasing motorists’ expectations of severe negative consequences associated with the maiming or killing of motorcyclists.

I believe this must be our strategy, and we must now define our tactics. I am asking all concerned motorcyclists to contribute to this process. And after what I experienced on my ride to Sturgis, I am willing to pay for your participation. Here is the offer:

IF YOU HAVE ANY SERIOUS, ORIGINAL, FEASIBLE AND LEGITIMATE IDEAS AS TO WHAT ACTIONS AMERICAN MOTORCYCLISTS CAN TAKE ON THE STREETS TO ENCOURAGE CAGERS TO HANG UP AND DRIVE AND/OR PENALIZE THOSE WHO DON’T, PLEASE POST IT ONLINE HERE:

<http://tinyurl.com/2j429z>

THE CONTRIBUTOR OF THE BEST QUALIFYING IDEA POSTED NO LATER THAN 15 SEPTEMBER 2007 WILL RECEIVE A CASH PRIZE OF ONE HUNDRED DOLLARS (\$100.00). ALL ENTRIES WILL BE JUDGED BY BRUCE ARNOLD, WHO WILL ANNOUNCE THE WINNER AND MAKE THE AWARD BY 15 OCTOBER 2007.

I’d offer more if I could afford it, but hey, I just got back from Sturgis.

Until Next Time ... Ride Long, Ride Free!

Bruce Arnold