

Moped Riders Lack Safety Rules, Information

By LINDA HOWELL

Increasing numbers of Americans are taking advantage of gas-sipping mopeds' 120 miles per gallon. But the roughly 800,000 moped riders who will be on the road by the end of 1979 lack safety information and licensing rules, say researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Highway Safety Research Center.

"Mopeds are so easy to drive and operate that people are unaware of safety problems," said HSRC staff associate William Hunter. "Since there are no required moped driver education courses or road tests, the rider does not have to be made aware in order to ride."

"Whether or not a rider gets any safety tips may depend on the moped dealer or the consumer's awareness of the available information," he said. "As far as I know, the Moped Association of America is the only organization that prints moped safety information."

Hunter, with his associates, Jane Stutts and J. Richard Stewart, recently completed a 15-month study that examined moped regulations, safety and accident data and forecasts possible U.S. moped safety problems during the next five to 10 years. Their work was funded by the U.S. Department of Transportation National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

The motor-driven bicycles generally are safer than motorcycles but not as safe as bicycles, the researchers found.

100 mopeds in use each year there will be between 1.5 and four accidents," Stutts said. "For motorcycles, there will be about the same number of accidents, but the motorcycle accidents are likely to be more severe."

"The Motorcycle Industry Council reports that 2.3 percent of all motorcycle accidents result in a fatality;

however, we estimate that approximately 1.2 percent of all moped accidents result in death."

Stutts said European data indicate that the most severe injuries are those to the head, chest, abdomen, back and legs.

Head injuries account for 35-55 percent of moped-rider injuries and 75-80 percent of

severe injuries and deaths.

Although European studies have shown that helmets reduce serious head injuries for moped riders, the researchers found that few moped riders wear helmets unless it is legally mandatory.

Three-quarters of all reported moped accidents involve a motor vehicle. More than 50 percent are angle or

turning accidents.

"Because of their size and their far-right lane position, mopeds have a visibility problem," Hunter said. "Drivers should be extremely aware of this and should take extra precautions when approaching intersections."

The researchers found moped regulations in 39 states and discovered that state laws

differ on maximum speed limits, minimum driver age and license requirements.

"The maximum speed limit ranges from 20-35 miles per hour, the legal driver age from 14-16 and the required license from none to a motorcycle license," Stutts said.

In their project report, Hunter and Stutts did not recommend specific laws

because they felt more accident and driver data were needed.

"Since mopeds are a relatively new vehicle in the United States, we had a lot of problems collecting data from the states," Hunter said. "We were able to collect police reported accident data from only 11 states. Most of our data came from European countries."

"Mopeds have been widely used in Europe since World War II, but government

regulations prevented imports and sales in the United States until late 1975.

"Before specific laws can be made in the United States, we need to identify, among other things, moped users and the type of moped rider most often involved in accidents."

"Mopeds are a viable means of transportation, with or without an energy crisis," Hunter said, "and we should take steps now to prevent moped safety from becoming a problem."

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4-H Retreat

"Let's Keep Sharing" was the theme for the Western District 4-H Leader Retreat that took place Aug. 17 through 19 at Schaub 4-H Camp in Waynesville. Mrs. Marion Wallin, 4-H leader of Marshall junior club, and Miss Sharon Carter, 4-H agent, attended from Madison County. Friday evening's program was excellent, with the Haywood County 4-H'ers giving a program of demonstrations, music, skits and games. Saturday morning a 4-H specialist from Raleigh gave workshops on the topics "Understanding Youth" and "Developing Learning Experiences." After lunch the Haywood County Rescue Squad gave a demonstration in learning rescue techniques and encouraging the group to participate.

Saturday night's program was one of the highlights of the retreat. It was designed as a "Share-in"; each county presented a 4-H program that had been successful in their own county. This proved helpful in giving others fresh, new ideas to improve their own program.

Marion Wallin also presented an interesting program on camping. She and her 4-H club members are avid campers.

"Let's Keep Sharing" was successful in promoting and encouraging the Western District 4-H leaders in their work with youth.

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