

One Great Idea

LAST MONTH I got the opportunity to attend STAR, the Sport-Touring Association Rendezvous, in Asheville, NC. STAR (not to be confused with Yamaha's Star line) is the national rally of HSTA, the Honda Sport Touring Association, a group of sport-touring riders from all around the country. Despite the name, HSTA welcomes riders of all makes, and in fact, I'd guess that among the 500 or so riders attending STAR this year, only about 50% were on Hondas. If there is a common thread among these riders, it is a true passion for riding, which was evident in the fact that between about 9 in the morning and 6 in the evening every day, the rally was almost totally deserted—because everyone was out riding.

I was greatly impressed with the level of camaraderie within this group, but even more so, despite their love of riding very quickly on challenging roads, they have a commitment to safety. Even with temperatures and humidity both soaring into the 90s, I can't recall seeing anyone riding without full safety gear, all the time.

And among the dozen or so members that I got a chance to ride with, I was also pleasantly surprised to witness a general skill level that surpassed any other group I had ever seen. Previously, I had only encountered riders this proficient when attending rallies of the two larger BMW groups, BMWMOA and BMWRA. However, I think I would still have to give the edge to the HSTA, for having a larger percentage of highly skilled riders within their ranks. (Just my opinion guys—and I noted that many of the HSTA riders were also Beemer riders, and carried dual memberships with one of the BMW clubs.)

Anyway, at the end of the rally, when we all gathered for dinner and an awards ceremony, something happened that I had never witnessed before at any of the hundreds of motorcycle rallies I had attended. The club's safety officer took the podium and started calling out names—over 40 of them, as I recall—and handing out checks anywhere from \$20 to several hundred dollars each.

I was intrigued, and asked someone at my table what was going on. To the best of my knowledge, this is how he explained it: The HSTA has always put a strong emphasis on riding safely, with properly maintained machines, ridden by well-trained riders, equipped with the best possible safety gear. However, they realized early on that all the teaching and encouragement in the world didn't go very far if



the members simply found it difficult to afford the best equipment or training. To address that problem, years ago they started a program, named after a popular member who died in a tragic accident, that was designed to encourage their members to get safety training and to buy the best safety gear.

The way the program works, if I understood it correctly, is that when any member buys any kind of safety gear, or attends any kind of safety training class, they fill out a simple form with their membership information on it, and mail it in to the national headquarters, along with a copy of the receipt. If you bought a helmet, gloves and boots all at the same time, you would send in separate forms for each one.

Then at the end of the year, all of those envelopes are put into a bin, and the safety officer draws them out. If one of your envelopes is drawn, the HSTA gives you a check equal to 50% of your safety-related purchase. In several cases, a single member had as many as four envelopes drawn, and got checks totaling over \$400. And they just keep drawing out envelopes until the fund is exhausted.

Later, they took up a collection to revitalize the fund, and I gathered that during the year, separate states, clubs and even individuals had fund-raising activities to build up the reserves. In fact, I heard it announced at the end of the day that the HSTA estimated that next year, there will probably be over 80 "winners" in what I like to call this "safety lottery."

Now, I want all of you involved with any kind of motorcycling club or association to think real hard about this. Whether you are a member of the GWRRA, GWTA, HOG, BMWMOA, HRCA or any other of the alphabet soup of

acronyms, or even just a small, local riding club—wouldn't this be a great program to start up within your group? We all talk about safety, and try to encourage it, but this is a chance to do something that is very real and tangible, right within our own ranks. I know that almost all of you already do a lot of charity fund-raising, but maybe it is time to remember that old saying that "charity begins at home."

If you think about it from strictly a personal standpoint, wouldn't you be more likely to replace that worn-out old helmet of yours with a really good but somewhat expensive model if you knew there was a real chance that you would get back half your money later? And wouldn't the same apply to your jacket, boots, gloves, etc.? Or how about signing up for that Experienced RiderCourse, or Keith Code's school? And even if the program perhaps didn't benefit you personally, wouldn't you feel good just knowing that by supporting it, you made it possible for some of your friends who might not have the financial wherewithal to still be able to buy good protective gear?

This could be done at the local, state, regional or even, like the HSTA, at the national level. The bigger it gets, the more of our riding friends it benefits, and if it grows really large, it could conceivably have an impact on the national fatality statistics for motorcyclists. And once we get the ball rolling, I wouldn't be a bit surprised if we couldn't get local dealerships, and maybe even some national suppliers of parts and accessories, to come on board as sponsors. Instead of waiting around for the government or the MSF or someone else to do something about improving motorcycle safety, here's a chance to do it ourselves. And in doing so, we would be showing the rest of the population that we really and truly are committed to the safety of our sport.

In closing, I want to give the HSTA one giant pat on the back for what I consider a truly great idea. And one last time, I want to encourage the rest of you to jump on the bandwagon. I'm going to a meeting of my local club tomorrow, and the first thing I am going to do there is try to get them to start a program just like this.

Whaddaya say, guys? Can we put our money where our mouths are?

—Fred Rau