

MOTORCYCLE FATALITY FILE, 2006

We all cringe when learning of yet another motorcycle fatality on South Australian roads. So far this year, we are up 38% on the same time last year, with 19 recorded deaths. So who are these people who have died so far this year and what demographic fact can we gleam when perusing the crash statistics? Some quite amazing things come out of just a casual investigation of the available figures.

Firstly, all victims are male – no real surprises here as testosterone can be a killer drug.

The shortest amount of time elapsing from acquiring their motorcycle license and fatally crashing is 1 day and the longest time elapsing being 8 years, with an average of approximately 2.5 years. So these guys are mainly inexperienced.

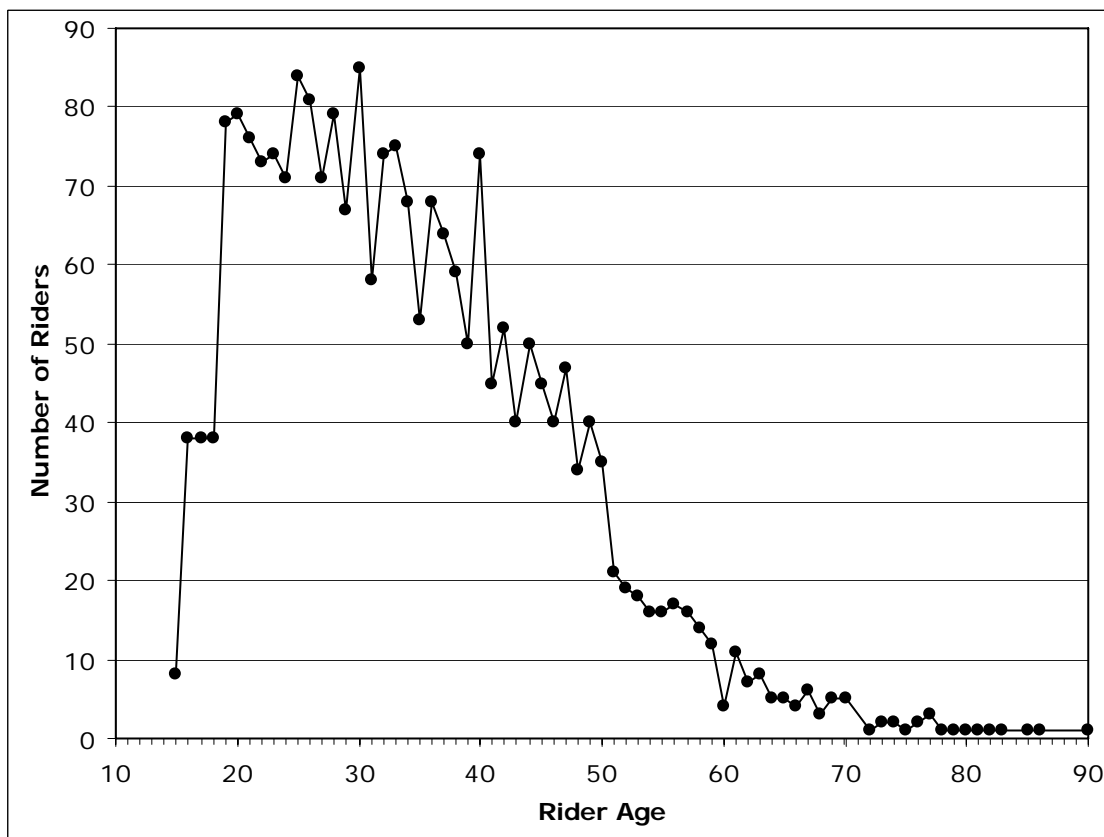
The shortest amount of time elapsing from purchasing their motorcycle and the rider fatally crashing is 1 day and the longest time elapsing is 3.4 years, with an average of just under 1 year. Again, this shows the sheer inexperience level of the victims and back up the conclusion gleamed from the previous figures.

The average engine capacity is 650cc.

The average age of the riders involved in motorcycle fatality crashes is 35 years.

Have a look at the accompanying graph showing the rider ages of the victims of serious motorcycle crashes in SA this year, it also includes the fatalities.

From the Centre of Automotive Safety Research



2006 Motorcycle casualty crashes (up to July 21st 2006)

The above graph closely ties in with the observation that the average age is 35 years. It shows a narrow band around the 25 to 40 year mark.

In the fatality figures, this band is even narrower and most of the 2006 victim's ages are between 30 and 40 years of age. (Something wonderful happens when you turn 50, you are twice as safe!!!!)

Further investigation reveals that 38% of the fatality crashes involved riders who were either unregistered or unlicensed. Were these 'unriders' never licensed or were riding after a license suspension? Further investigation is needed here.

Motorcyclists have long held the view that car drivers are mostly at fault in fatality crashes with motorcycles. **WRONG!!**

The fatality file for 2006 reveals that the vast majority of fatal crashes were 'single vehicle' crashes. In other words, the motorcyclists simply stuffed up and caused their own demise. This is a fact; we can't blame another vehicle for the majority of these crashes.

Why did the motorcyclists stuff up?

Obviously most of the victims were quite inexperienced – we all are still learning after many years of riding, it is an ongoing thing! Ridersafe was probably the only training they have ever received.

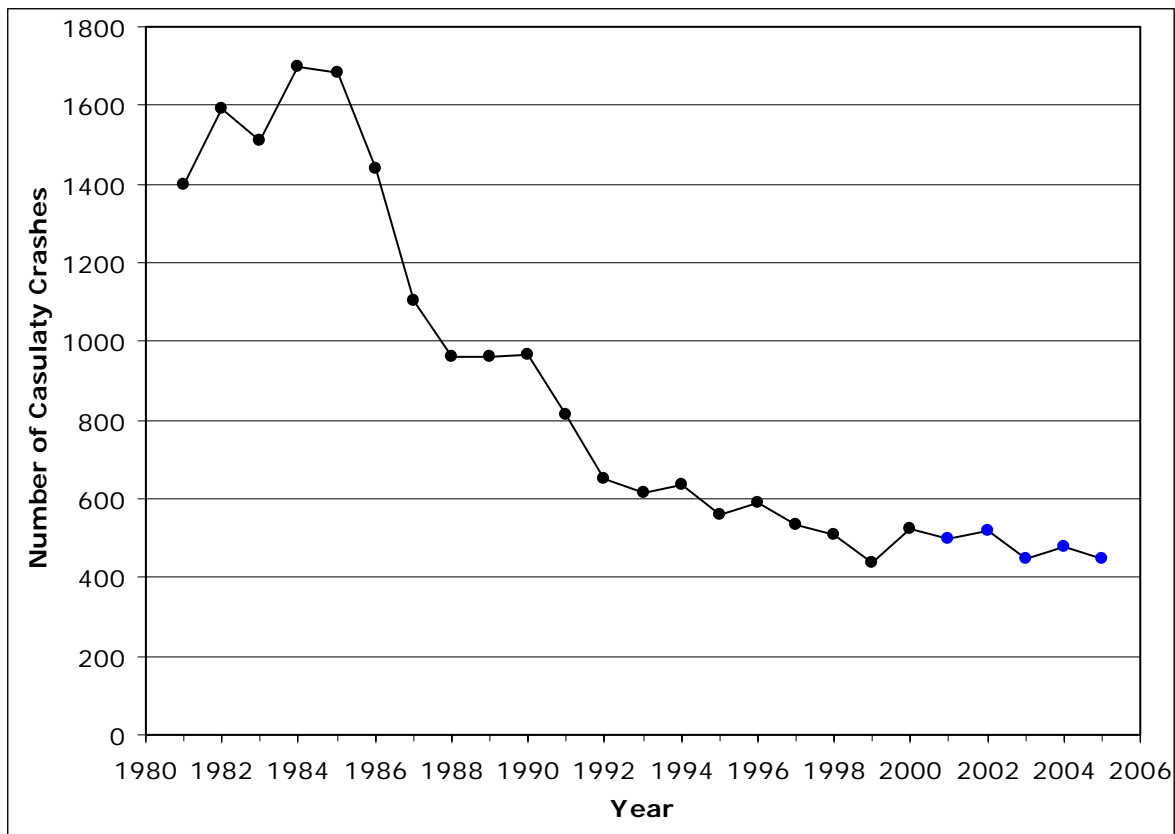
The other and probably more important reason for the victims to stuff up was the fact that the majority of them were traveling at high speeds and in some cases, extremely high speeds.

The majority of fatal crashes occurred in a 60 kph zone further indicating excessive speed as a cause of death.

I cannot comment on individual cases, as the Coroners Inquiries are ongoing, but it is a simple fact that speed was the probable major cause of the majority of the fatal crashes experienced so far this year.

The total number of motorcycle crashes over the years is ever decreasing, so how come the number of fatalities is increasing this year. One answer is that the number of bikes on the road is increasing at a rapid rate. Motorcycle sales are accelerating, up >20% compared with this time last year, with scooter sales experiencing a 46% increase over the same period last year, so we can therefore expect a small increase in crashes to go with the increased participation rate. Of course, when dealing with small numbers, the stats can be slewed out of proportion. More long time stored machines are being removed from the rear of the shed as motorcycling in general becomes more popular.

Graph from the Automotive Safety Research Centre.



Motorcycle serious crashes in SA over the past 25 years

I hope we never go back to the bad days on 1985 when the fatality numbers were 45 deaths. We have come a long way since then.

Have a look at the marked decrease post 1987. This coincides with the advent of the compulsory Ridersafe course. The fatality numbers since 1987 have dropped even more dramatically. Perhaps we now need a dedicated program to drop the numbers again like they did in 1987. Maybe an easily accessible and cheap advanced rider training course will do the trick again in 2006/2007?

OK, what can be done to stop the motorcycle carnage in the future? The easiest program to implement is that of increased enforcement. As we have seen, speed is a major factor so far this year and to bring these speeds down will require that the culprits are caught and punished. Unfortunately this will mean that ALL motorcyclists will be targeted in such a campaign. License checking will catch the 'unriders'. So what, a little inconvenience and we are on our way again.

Already SAPOL are placing their cameras in highly trafficked motorcycle roads in the Lobethal to Cudlee Creek area with quite startling results. Reckless motorcyclists will be caught and hopefully when they get their licenses back, will be redirected to the correct place for speed and take up bracket racing at Mallala.

A proactive approach would be to introduce a cheap advanced rider training course and to have a media campaign to alert motorcyclists to upgrade their skills, promote the value of advanced rider training and to extol car drivers to be aware of motorcyclists as these types of crashes haven't completely disappeared.

It is obvious that a very small number of errant motorcyclists are intent on their own demise. From the statistics, they are relatively inexperienced and suffer from a feeling of invincibility. They are above the law. Too many crash and burn computer games in their informative years? Could be!

Their attitudes need to change – now there's a challenge!

Maybe enforcement is the only language they understand as their toys are wheeled away and impounded and they are forced to resort to bicycles to get around on.

Neville Gray
Public Liaison Coordinator
Ulysses Club Inc.

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