

Harold Scruby is the Pedestrian Council of Australia (PCA). Scruby from Sydney and X Melbourne policeman Ray Shuey are prime movers in the push for front plates/stickers/tags for motorcycles and scooters. This 2003 newspaper article on Scruby is an interesting read.

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Drive - Peter McKay

Who is Harold Scruby? Peter McKay profiles the stirrer-cum-chairman of the Pedestrian Council of Australia.

Detractors dismiss Harold Scruby as an attention-grabbing human headline more interested in self-promotion than saving lives, someone who has turned himself into an instant expert on everything connected with road safety.

He makes politicians squirm, safety experts cringe and the media do cartwheels. A day barely passes when, as the chairman of the Pedestrian Council of Australia, Harold Charles Wolfe Scruby isn't quoted in the press or interviewed for radio or television.

Who is this man, whom Mike Carlton once dismissed thus: "I suspect the grandly named Pedestrian Council is only Harold and his fax machine"?

His admirers insist that Scruby is one of few road safety activists prepared to speak out and risk offending the all-powerful Roads and Traffic Authority.

Unquestionably, Scruby has agitated, pushed and embarrassed an otherwise glacial NSW Government into initiating life-saving measures.

He is proud of being the prime mover in persuading Transport Minister Carl Scully to introduce 40kmh school safety zones and then, after more salvoes from Scruby, to install speed cameras to enforce the limit.

Other favourite targets include urban four-wheel-drive wagons fitted with bullbars and fishing rod holders, and feral bicycle couriers on city footpaths.

The 4WDs should carry a "death" duty, he believes. Instead, they are imported at a lower tariff than safer passenger cars.

Scruby says many bullbars and rod holders are illegal under current legislation but that the RTA and police are too gutless (a recurring description) to act.

He also happily dubs in drivers who park illegally.

"I know some people don't like me and I honestly don't have a problem with being thought of as a shit-stirrer," Scruby says calmly. Advocacy is about passion and persistence.

The National Motorists Association of Australia (NMAA), which questions Scruby's authority to speak on all road safety matters, says he should concentrate on saving pedestrians.

"More than 73 per cent of pedestrian fatalities are entirely the fault of the pedestrian," says the NMAA. More than 30 per cent of pedestrians killed in road accidents last year were intoxicated,

it says, and 80 per cent of those heavily so.

"Scrubby would better serve his cause by spending his funding on educating pedestrians instead of demanding lower speed limits. Instead of focusing on speed, Scrubby's PCA should demand enforcement of no-stopping and no-parking zones at schools.

"Unfortunately, his actions tend to be random rather than focused on analysis of need."

The association says it nevertheless respects the activist as an individual for promoting road safety. "The community has benefited from his high-profile stance on road safety. He is part of the solution. It is a shame that the PCA often seems to view motor vehicles as the whole problem."

The host of ABC TV's Media Watch, David Marr, was a classmate of Scrubby at Shore. Marr says he has the uncanny ability to make others pay attention, despite always rubbing people up the wrong way.

"Harold just goes for it," says Marr. "He barks, he savages them and he never stops. He's a mad bugger but people listen to him and, in the end, get quite fond of him. He hasn't changed since he drove us crazy in the classroom and in the playground.

"But Harold has never been able to calculate where he should concentrate his energies. And today I still have no idea what drives him."

Another classmate who now sits on the same Australian College of Road Safety committee, Jeff McDougall remembers a "very colourful kid, often in trouble with teachers".

McDougall agrees with a lot of what Scrubby is trying to do on road safety matters, although Scrubby irritates him and everybody else at meetings.

"I just think that he is so over the top at times, and gets people offside, that it takes twice as long as it should to get results. Harold has a tendency to attack the person more than the issue. However, it does seem to get him in the news."

Scrubby married leading model Cathy Wilding, worked for a jeans label, started a business and became a Mosman councillor, finely honing his pedantry and delivery of the insult. Targets included the mayor's toupee, incontinent canines, smokers and joggers on public streets.

In 1986, Scrubby allegedly drove his Mercedes into a jogger. He was acquitted of a charge of wanton driving after the magistrate blamed the jogger.

At the exclusive Cabbage Tree Club at Palm Beach, he says, he fought a now-rescinded rule that prevented Koreans and Japanese from being guests or members. He is no longer a member.

He jumped with usual zeal into the push for a new flag, founding and running Ausflag. He took on runner Tani Ruckle for running illegally around leafy Mosman and "breaking the law every time she doesn't use the footpath".

Memorable stoushes with the RSL's crusty Bruce Ruxton led to a court action. "Brucey paid for some of my swimming pool," he likes to say with a laugh.

A crusader for proper use of English, Scrubby found time on the road to notoriety to write a book called Waynespeak and a second, slender one, Manglish.

Today, his time is devoted mainly to road safety. He runs the PCA from a nondescript office in Mosman, hair neat as a pin and invariably in suit and tie should he need to meet a minister or provide a jolting grab for the evening news.

Scrubby clearly sees his role extending far beyond the interests of the walking class. He routinely rails against TV commercials he thinks are in breach of the advertising standards and pressures the advertising watchdogs to pull them.

Friends say a pleasant lunch or coffee with Scrubby is likely to be disrupted when he leaps up to accost a motorist who is double-parked or in a no-stopping zone.

Gavin Goeldner, a Queensland road safety activist, dismisses Scrubby as a zealot without a

rational viewpoint: "It's pretty clear that Scruby has almost single-handedly set up the PCA as a vehicle to advance his political career and his oddball views."

Goeldner suggests parts of the media portray Scruby as an expert on all road safety issues.

"We should question both his motives and the appropriateness of the [PCA's] funding from the NRMA, NSW Motor Accident Commission and RTA of NSW. It is almost like the government is happy to cop some of his more outrageous outbursts as long as he leads the cheer squad for speed cameras and other draconian enforcement methods."

Scruby says he isn't anti-car (he now drives a BMW 3 Series).

He criticises some senior NSW police for mismanaging the truth on road safety statistics, claiming they are merely spin doctors for the government. He says he has been threatened by people in power. This comes as no surprise.