

Bruce on Bikers' Rights

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IS THERE A FIRE? WILL BRAIN BUCKETS PUT IT OUT? *Charting NHTSA Numbers Exposes Flawed NTSB Recommendations*



Let me begin by stating once again that as a 24/7 biker and long distance rider, I use and recommend the use of helmets when riding a motorcycle. In fact, I cannot imagine riding through several hundred miles of adverse weather without one. On the other hand, I fully appreciate the difference between the *utility of helmets* and the *futility of helmet laws*. I tried to explain that difference to Deborah Hersman and the rest of the National Transportation Safety Board (“NTSB”) in September of 2006:

http://www.ldrlongdistancerider.com/motorcyclists_rights/bikersrights0610.php

I tried to explain it again to NTSB Chairman Mark “The Creepster” Rosenker...

http://americanhistory.si.edu/maroon/crp_fm.htm

...in September of 2007:

<http://pub42.bravenet.com/forum/3562429698/fetch/859099/>

But they didn't listen ... or didn't care. Instead, the following month they illegally conspired with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (“NHTSA”) to circumvent the state lobbying restrictions imposed by TEA-21 (the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century)...

<http://pub42.bravenet.com/forum/3562429698/fetch/864322/>

...and issued to the governors of all 50 states a series of “Motorcycle Safety Recommendation Letters”...

http://ntsb.gov/Publictn/2007/AB07-Motorcycle_Safety_Rec-Ltr.htm

...in which they spun the following:

“The Safety Board is concerned about motorcycle safety and the growing number of riders that have been killed or injured in motorcycle crashes. Since 1997, the number of motorcycle fatalities has increased 127 percent, an increase that far exceeds that of any other form of transportation. In fact, the number of motorcycle fatalities in any recent year has been more than double the number of deaths that same year from accidents in aviation, rail, marine, and pipeline combined. In 2006, for example, 4,810 motorcyclists died in crashes, and motorcycle fatalities accounted for more than 10 percent of all motor vehicle crash fatalities. The following figure clearly shows the rising numbers. Although rising motorcycle use may partly explain this trend, increases in fatalities have outpaced increases in activity measures such as motorcycle

registrations and vehicle miles traveled.”-- http://www.nts.gov/recs/letters/2007/h07_38.pdf

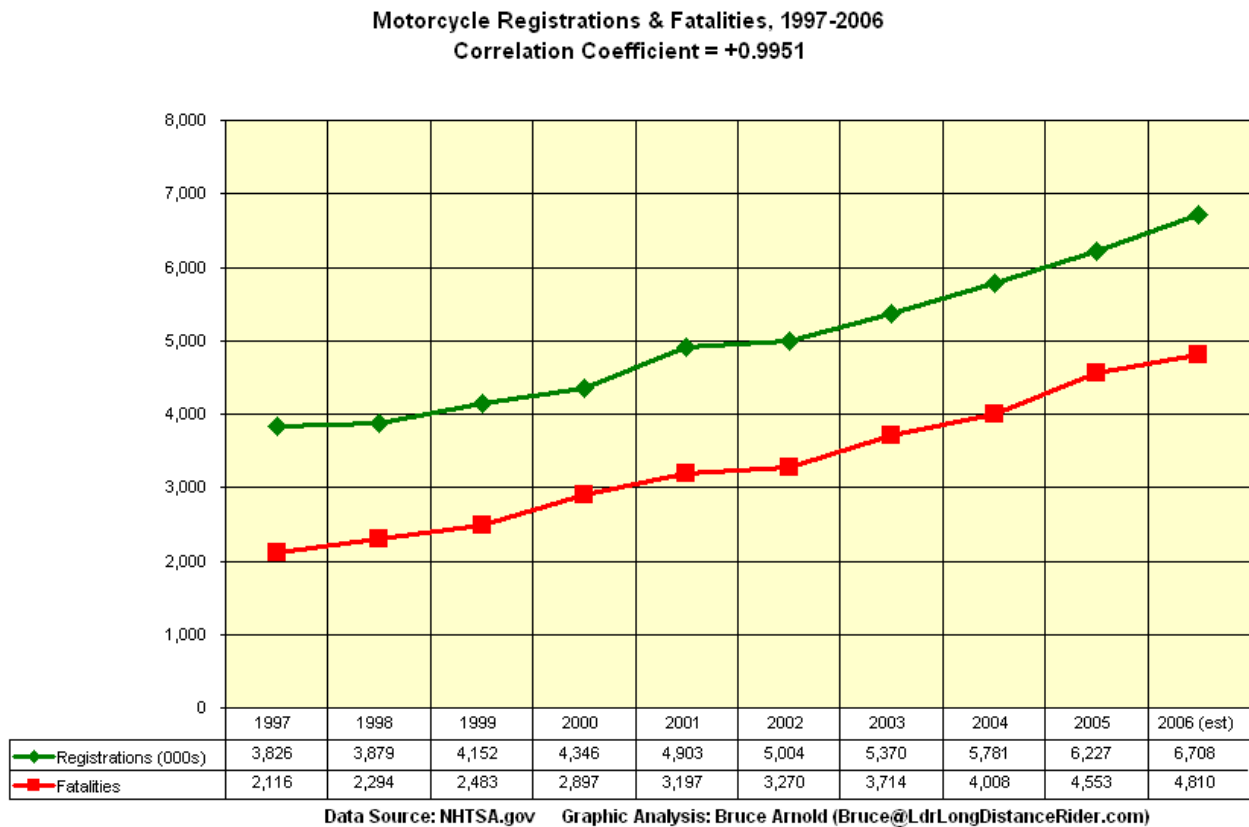
THIS IS A LIE. Not a complete lie, of course, but the most effective type of lie: One that is 80 percent true. First of all, the NTSB *knew* when they released this that any comparisons involving VMT (vehicle miles traveled) statistics were absolutely meaningless:

http://www.ldrlongdistancerider.com/motorcyclists_rights/bikersrights0710-2.php

The more blatant fabrication, however, was the claim that “...increases in fatalities have outpaced increases in activity measures such as motorcycle registrations.” Baloney! Even without making allowances for the NTSB Ph.D. Margaret Sweeney’s open admission that NHTSA’s motorcycle registration numbers are probably understated...

<http://ccrealserver.gmu.edu/ramgen/nts/091107/nts091107.smi>

...the following chart clearly shows that **over the last 10 years, motorcycle fatalities have NOT outpaced increases in motorcycle registrations. In fact, the two measures have a near-perfect correlation coefficient of +0.9951:**



So, “is there a fire”? If by that you mean are motorcycle fatalities outpacing registrations by a statistically significant amount, the answer is clearly “NO”. For the sake of discussion, however, let’s say there *is* a fire. Will brain buckets put it out? Here’s what the NTSB Nannycrats told our governors:

“NHTSA estimates that from 1975 through 2005, seat belts saved more than 211,000 lives nationwide. During that same period, all states, except New Hampshire, enacted mandatory seat belt use laws; and usage rates have increased nationwide from about 12 percent in the early 1970s to 81 percent today. The Safety Board is confident that there is ample evidence that similar life saving results can be achieved through motorcycle helmet laws that apply to all riders and passengers.”-- http://www.nts.gov/recs/letters/2007/h07_38.pdf

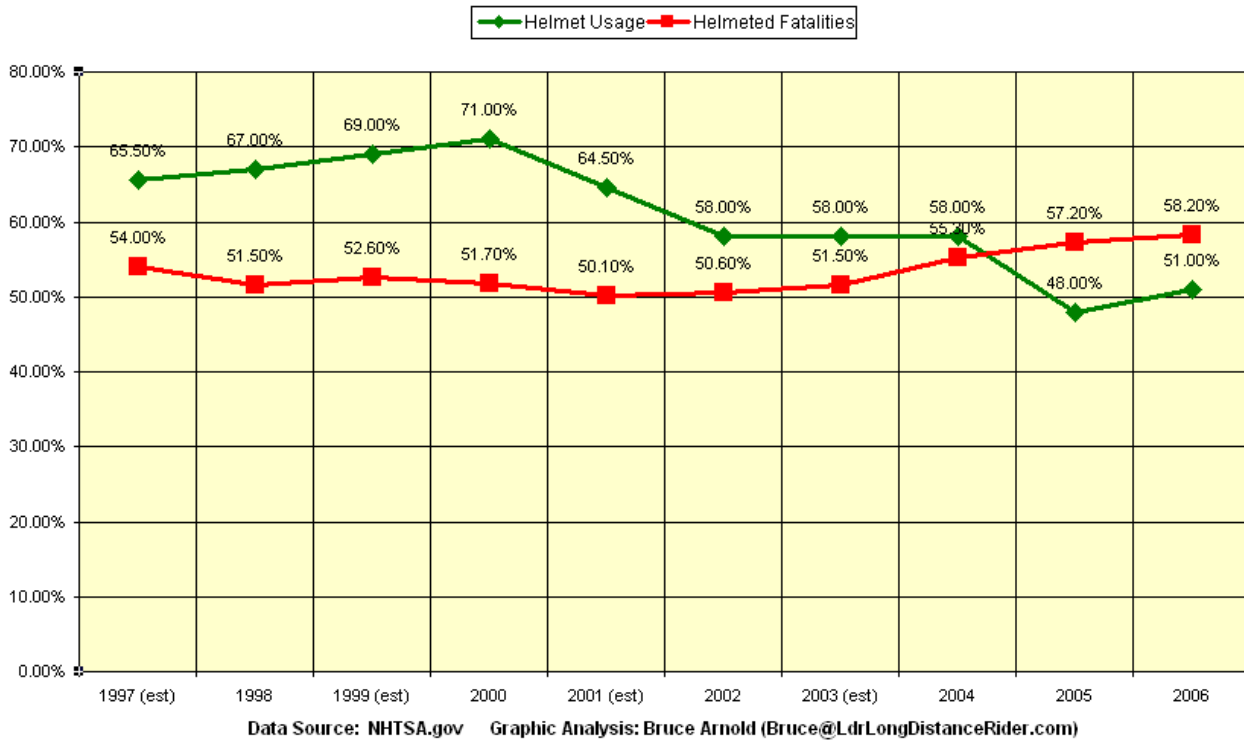
THIS TOO IS A LIE. And again, not a complete lie, but a partial truth. As David Harsanyi wrote on page 223 of his new book, The Nanny State:

*“NHTSA authorities claim that seat-belt legislation has reduced the number of casualties in road accidents by more than 10,000 lives every year. But as is often the case, quantifying the fantastic numbers used by government agencies can be complicated. After all, automobile fatality rates have been declining progressively since 1925... They have decreased by 50 percent every twenty years, with seatbelts and without them. In truth, **we have no idea how many people would be saved by seat-belt laws**—because most citizens would voluntarily wear seat belts. Many other factors, including safer car designs and better road conditions, also play a part.” And as for New Hampshire, Mr. Harsanyi goes on to observe it is curious that “...in Maine, a state with more or less the identical population of New Hampshire, the number of auto fatalities is also nearly identical (Maine’s 169 to New Hampshire’s 166 in 2005).”-- <http://tinyurl.com/2k5pho>*

There is in fact no logical basis for comparing the protection offered by being strapped down in a car to that of wearing a helmet on a bike. They are apples and oranges: One affixes a body to an object, while the other affixes an object to a body. Beyond that, however, the most flagrant fabrication of all here is the NTSB’s claim that “...*there is ample evidence that ... life saving results can be achieved through motorcycle helmet laws.*” What “evidence” are they referring to, and if it’s so “ample”, why didn’t they provide some of it?

In order to prove that helmet laws save lives, one would need to show that an increase in helmet usage by motorcycle riders yields a decrease in fatalities among those riders. That is NOT what the following chart indicates:

Motorcycle Helmet Usage vs. Helmeted Fatalities, 1997-2006
Correlation Coefficient = -0.6859



Over the 10-year (1997-2006) period charted, NHTSA motorcycle helmet usage and helmeted fatalities percentages do show a moderate negative correlation coefficient of -0.6859, which by itself would suggest that helmeted riders are under-represented among motorcycle fatalities. But as the chart above reveals, whatever safety advantage helmet usage may have offered not only diminished but actually reversed itself in 2005 and 2006, where as you can see helmeted riders are actually *over*-represented among fatalities. This analysis does not suggest that helmet usage has become a contributing factor to motorcycle fatalities. It does, however, FAIL to prove that either motorcycle helmets or laws mandating their use have any consistent significant impact on overall motorcycle fatality statistics. So in other words:

If there *is* a fire, brain buckets will *not* put it out.

Speaking strictly for myself and no other individuals or organizations,

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