



Motorcycle Riders Foundation

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REEXAMINING THE DEFINITION OF A MOTORCYCLE

Background:

Currently the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) defines the term “motorcycle,” for the purpose of the statute and regulations it administers, as “a motor vehicle with motive power having a seat or saddle for the use of the rider and designed to travel on not more than three wheels in contact with ground” (49 CFR 571.3). This has not been revised or amended since initially defined back in 1967.

In recent years a new type of vehicle has entered our roadways, commonly called an autocycle. These autocycles are classified as motorcycles but have little resemblance or operational characteristics to that of a motorcycle. This ambiguity about autocycles has created a patchwork of rules and regulations regarding licensing, insurance, registration and training courses from state to state.

MRF Position:

The Motorcycle Riders Foundation encourages NHTSA to carefully review and update the definition of a motorcycle. The MRF believes a more appropriate definition would be *“a motor vehicle, as was originally manufactured, with motive power, having a seat or saddle requiring the rider to sit astride, designed to travel on not more than three wheels in contact with the ground, steering controlled by handlebars, acceleration and braking controlled by handlebar and foot controls and capable of reaching speeds in excess of 30 mph.”*

In 2019 a bipartisan group of lawmakers sent a letter to NHTSA asking for clarification of the current definition and whether a revised definition might be appropriate. The lead author of the letter was Congressman Michael Burgess of Texas.

Request:

When your office has dealings with DOT or NHTSA please consider asking about the current definition of a motorcycle and whether this 40-year-old definition is appropriate in 2021.