DfT Motorcycle Safety

1. Précis

“This campaign is the best as of yet. The other shock ones gave a message, but this one sticks in your head – bikers are people, and people need to remember about bikers.”

This is the story of how a novel approach to motorcycle safety communication reaped rewards - changing attitudes and claimed behaviours amongst key audiences by humanising motorcyclists to those most likely to cause them harm.

2. Context

Despite making up only 1% of road traffic, motorcyclists account for a hugely disproportionate 21% of deaths on the road. In 2009, 472 motorcyclists died, and 5,350 were seriously injured in road accidents in Great Britain.

Of particular note is the fact that 75% of collisions resulting in death or serious injury involve another vehicle.

Unsurprisingly, motorcycle safety communications have traditionally tackled this fact head on, both literally and metaphorically. In particular, advertising has sought to highlight and address the key reason for the majority of collisions between bikers and drivers: drivers simply don’t see the motorcyclist until it’s too late to avoid hitting them:


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1 Facebook wall post on THINK! Biker page
2 DfT Road Casualty Statistics
2. ‘Looking but not seeing’ and the role for communications

Whilst previous campaigns had worked hard to raise awareness of the importance of looking for motorcyclists (particularly at junctions), collisions between motorcyclists and drivers continued to be of particular concern in 2009.

It was clear that ‘looking but not seeing’ remained the issue. However, the reasons that drivers don’t ‘see’ motorcyclists were less evident. Although motorcyclists were sometimes obscured by the motorist’s blind spot, in many instances the biker was in plain view.

A number of sources helped us to understand the issue more deeply.

Firstly, an academic discovery in the field of psychology – the theory of inattentive blindness:

“Most people believe that if our eyes are open, we are seeing. Cognitive scientists once thought the same way. They thought our visual perception acted much like a videotape recorder with the mind recording everything the eyes take in. We now know that this is not the case. More and more, perception studies are demonstrating how little people actually see when they are not paying attention (Carpenter, 2001). The explanation lies in a relatively recent discovery in the field of psychology called inattentional blindness. According to Goldstein (2002), inattentional blindness refers to “a situation in which a stimulus that is not attended is not perceived, even though a person is looking directly at it.”3

This inattentional blindness is a useful explanation for ‘looking but not seeing’. However, we still needed to understand the reason for this blindness. A related theory – that of cognitive conspicuity – shed further light. Conspicuity – or ‘mental visibility’ – “greatly increases if a stimulus is relevant or meaningful to the observer (Green, 2003).” Could it be that motorcyclists were simply not relevant or meaningful to the observer, or driver? Did they not care enough?

An in depth qualitative study by Flamingo investigated further. Drivers and riders focus groups were supplemented by online ‘deep thinks’ – anonymous group discussions. Finally, one-on-one and paired depths of riders and drivers and rider friendship groups added further insight.

Sure enough, we discovered that motorcyclists and drivers were not ‘meaningful’ to each other. Rather, the opposite appeared to be true- many viewed the ‘other camp’ as a nuisance, or worse...

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3 An Overview and Some Applications of Inattentional Blindness Research: Todd A. Ward, Austin State University
A semiotic study by Sign Salad built up the picture still more. This study suggested that the antipathy between drivers and motorcyclist was based not just on road behaviour, but on the symbolism of their distinctive protective gear:

“The highly functional uniform of the motorcyclist, with his leathers and crash helmet, closely resembles and therefore signifies such nightmarish figures from myth, fiction and the world at large whose attire is the way it is for nefarious functional reasons (e.g. bank robber), for ceremonial, symbolic purposes (e.g. Ku Klux Klan member), or very specifically because it has been designed by the storyteller to cast a sinister spell on the observer (e.g. Jason/Eminem).”

Of particular note was an example from the iconic movie Top Gun. At the end of the film, the US pilots come up against enemy MiGs in the Pacific. The image of Maverick and his colleagues has already been established: vibrant, full of life and personal idiosyncrasies. Maverick’s persona in the cockpit is almost as colourful – showing a personalized helmet and close up shots of his eyes, conveying his very real emotions there and then:

The enemy MiG fighters, though, are depicted very differently. No facial information is given because of a black motorcycle-like helmet. They signify mindless or at least heartless soldiers bent on defeating the heroic Americans.

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4 Motorcycle Road Safety – A topline semiotic review for DfT and AMV by Sign Salad
These cultural signs not only demonise the rider, they also make it difficult for the driver to see the motorcyclist as human, and deserving of empathy. As author Henry Gregor Felson said in a long out of print 1976 book about motorcycling: “If the car driver thinks of all cyclists as Hell's Angels and hoods, noisy nuisances who flout law and order, get in his way, and are looking for trouble, you’re in trouble, even if you’re wearing your pin for perfect attendance at Sunday School.”

This detailed research into the reasons that drivers ‘look but don’t see’ was enormously helpful. Once we understood that inattentional blindness was caused by lack of cognitive conspicuity, and that this in turn was caused by an absence of care or affection for riders due to cultural signs as well as on-road behaviour, this crystallised the role for communications:

**Build empathy between drivers and motorcyclists**

Like many good strategies, this feels obvious. However, even a cursory look through the annals of motorcycle advertising history (as referenced at the start of this paper) will reveal how different this approach is. Rather than highlight the dangers represented by the other party, we were seeking to bring these audiences together.

3. **If you got to know me, I think that you would like me very much:** The creative and media strategy

Our new knowledge shaped the creative brief:

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5 Living with your first motorcycle by Henry Gregor Felson
And one further piece of found research crystallised the creative opportunity:

**If you know a motorcyclist, you are less likely to be involved in an accident with one.**

The resulting campaign idea sought to ‘reveal’ motorcyclists to drivers in order to encourage them to think of bikers as humans, just like them. We wanted drivers to feel that they knew motorcyclists; not faceless cyborgs, but ordinary people with ordinary lives. Most likely, a middle aged bloke with a family and a job to get to – as complex and as straightforward as we all are, and worthy of consideration on the road.

Early creative development research hinted at the potency of revealing the person behind the helmet:

- They are people with lives and relationships. If you hit them you will ruin their life.
  - Pragmatist Aspirant, 17-19, York

- I like that one. I like what they have done with the humour and it also gives you situations on the road - the driver taking another look, paying a bit more attention, is very clever. Because you can see yourself in the car just taking a bit more care – looking twice.
  - Driver, 20-28, Birmingham

The creative work itself encourages drivers to think about the person on the bike by introducing some of them, with all their foibles. TV introduced a number of bikers, accompanied by a soundtrack that quite literally suggested that drivers might like the bikers that they got to know.

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6 Car Drivers Attitudes to Motorcycle Safety: A Review, Nottingham University
7 Flamingo Qualitative Research
TV was amplified by localised radio, posters, online display, car stickers, petrol station activity and a youtube channel.

At petrol stations, we advertised on forecourts and pumps:
Online targeted consumers as they searched for routes:

Media choices recognised the importance of empowering bikers to make themselves known to drivers as well as appealing to drivers in personal environments:

- Improve drivers’ ability to identify with riders and see them as real people
- Empowering riders to make themselves known to drivers

Personalisation and Relevance is crucial

Remove the helmet on bikers: speak to drivers in personal, and where possible, local environments, while maintaining a significant awareness presence on every journey in order to force recognition. For riders, we gave them a platform to promote who they really are under the helmet.
In practical and applied terms, TV spots gave the message traction amongst all road users and generated mass awareness and buzz – acting as a catalyst to drive people online to find out more or get involved. Complimentarily, cinema and outdoor further energised the campaign and helped to engage the audience.

Radio (Heart, Magic and Galaxy) provided the perfect in-car reminder to drivers in local and relevant environments. To ensure maximum relevance, we split the UK into ten regions and recommended the DfT commission ten different personalised radio spots – the first time they’d ever tailored a campaign in this way. We ensured that the creative exploited these fully, using localised messages.

Radio sponsorship, with GMG Radio Solutions (Real, Smooth and Rock), extended the regional approach through advertorials specific to each radio region and brand. These showed listeners how motorcyclists didn’t always conform to stereotypes. Engagement was extended on the radio brand’s websites through a “THINK BIKE, THINK BIKER” microsite. Any DJs who were also bikers recorded messages to run alongside advertorials in their local area.

Online, display ads in personal spaces such as social networks and driving-related sites (such as AA and Streetmap) used IP addresses to deliver localised copy and huge cut-through. Online was a core channel for both our audiences and offered a platform on which Riders could be empowered to further the message themselves. Using Facebook, a THINK BIKER page was set up which encouraged bikers and drivers alike to join and make themselves known to each other. Bikers could amend their profile pictures to include a personalised THINK BIKER logo. Moreover, the page acted as an intermediary between the DfT, riders and drivers enabling the DfT to monitor and communicate with road users like never before.

### Media | Role | Deployment
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TV & Cinema | Mass awareness and buzz | TV 30", 40", 60" spot Cinema 60" spot
Radio | In-car reminder, local and relevant environments | 30" regionalised copy
Radio Spons. | Harnessing trusted voices | GMG partnership
Out of Home | On the road reminder medium | Petrol station door vinyls
Digital | Harnessing route planning online and relevance | AA, Streetmap, IP targeted
Social Media | Biker engagement and talkability | Facebook page

4. The campaign worked, and how - results

Our Named Rider campaign did not use shock tactics. Unusually for road safety advertising, the message is complicit and encouraging, and there is no ‘moment of impact’. Despite this, advertising awareness was strong at 56% (source BMRB).
More importantly, our campaign effectively helped to shift attitudes by encouraging drivers to think about the person riding the bike, with a significant improvement in the proportion of people that agree that ‘when I see a motorcyclist, I think about the person riding it’ (from 51% to 58%).

Most importantly of all, we also saw evidence that the campaign had the potential to change behaviour, with the proportion of people agreeing that they ‘always look out for motorcyclists’ increasing significantly (from 84% to 91%).

Of particular note has been the response to the facebook THINK Biker! page. During the campaign on-air period, we received 86,268 THINK! Biker pages viewed, 4,638 user interactions, 1,873 video plays, 1,591 photo views and 811 wall posts. With people still joining the group every day (last count over 34,000 fans!), this page has become a lasting legacy.

But what of actual, real world impact? Drawing a straight line between advertising and lives saved is notoriously difficult. THINK! finds success in the absence of things – when it does its job, nothing happens. As a result, drivers don’t kill or hurt themselves and we never hear about it. However, our award winning IPA paper of 2010 quantified the THINK! shaped gap at the heart of road safety since 2000. It estimates that every pound spent on advertising delivers a saving of round £9.36. Over the past decade, we estimate that up to 3,912 lives have been saved by the THINK! campaign. We are confident that Named Riders is more than playing its part.