

# Motor scooter safety increases with use of helmet

By Paul Coughlin  
Of the Emerald

Motor scooters complement the active and trying lifestyle of the college student. The money saved on up-keep, gas and insurance, along with easy handling and parking, makes the scooter the preferred form of motorized transportation on campus.

Last week, a bill calling for reinstatement of a law requiring motorcyclists to wear helmets was introduced in the House of Representatives. The bill currently is being amended to include scooter and moped riders as well as motorcycle riders under the helmet requirement.

Currently, 20 states have mandatory helmet laws.

The current Oregon law says anyone under the age of 18, including passengers, must wear a helmet on either a moped, motor scooter or motorcycle.

The legislative battle over the mandatory helmet law is expected to be heated. But the dangers of a scooter to the inexperienced rider, and the scooter's ever-increasing popularity, have given supporters of the helmet law a wealth of ammunition from which to draw.

Motor scooter insurance premiums have not gone up like the skyrocketing premiums of

automobiles because "insurance companies will not put medical coverage on a scooter. Since medical coverage is not an added expense for insuring a motor scooter, the premiums haven't increased dramatically," said Bill Anderson of All-State Insurance in Eugene.

The slight increase in scooter premiums is due to rising liability lawsuits filed by those injured from scooters, said Dan Miller from Farmers Insurance Group.

But that explanation doesn't "hold well with the critics" who believe the slight increase is the result of greedy insurance companies, he said.

Insurance companies provide different coverage for scooters because in Oregon 3 percent of all drivers ride motorcycles or scooters, yet they account for 11.8 percent of all traffic fatalities, Miller said.

That statistic has caused some insurance companies to avoid insuring scooters, he said.

"The scooter became popular about late '83, early '84," said Glen Zech of Honda of Eugene.

He said most customers buy helmets when buying a scooter, and there is no difference in factors of safety between scooters and motorcycles. "It all depends on the rider," Zech said.

Honda's largest clientele is by far the college student, Zech said.

The increased scooter sales accounted for Honda's biggest increase in profits last year, he said.

The Center for Neuro-

Educational Therapy caters primarily to those with head injury. Director Don Prickle acknowledges there haven't been many patients at the center resulting from scooter accidents.

But he predicts with the steady popularity of motor scooters and the increase in their use, there will be more and more victims from scooter accidents.

"Head injury is the largest killer of people under 35," Prickle said. The main causes of head injuries are driving or riding too fast, drinking and riding without a helmet.

"There would be a large increase in head injury if it wasn't for the bike lanes in this area," he said.

Lack of helmet use among college students concerns Barbara Nicholls, a counselor in the University's Academic Advising and Student Services Department.

She believes the lack of helmet use is a "cultural quirk," found especially in the United States and stemming from the fondness America has for "independence."

In London, "a person wouldn't think of getting on a scooter without a helmet... they would feel naked," Nicholls said. She is currently working on a marketing plan to make helmets more popular.

Last year, Eugene only had one fatal scooter accident, said Sgt. Tom Mason of the Eugene Police Traffic Division. The woman who was killed

"probably would've survived if she was wearing a helmet," he said.

The main cause of scooter accidents is "rider inexperience," Mason said. Scooter riders tend to think the scooter is not as dangerous as a motorcycle, he said. "People think scooters are a toy and don't take them seriously."

Riders often don't wear the proper protective gear pants, a long shirt and jacket, boots, gloves and helmet.

"People think just because they're going slow they won't get hurt," Mason said. But most fatal accidents involving two-wheeled vehicles occur between 25 and 30 miles per hour, he said.

With years of experience riding motorcycles in his division and experience with different styles of scooters, Mason said motorcycles are safer because the scooter's center of gravity and smaller wheel size, which rotates more when cornering, gives the scooter less stability when turning.

Dan Porter from the Oregon Traffic Safety Commission in Salem, says, "If ridden correctly... scooters are safe."

However, he complains that scooter riders and passengers rarely if ever wear the proper protective clothing.

"Riders of scooters are at as much risk as any motorcycle rider" if not more because they "are harder to see in traffic," Porter said.

For training in scooter safety, contact Shannon Kracht at Lane Community College.

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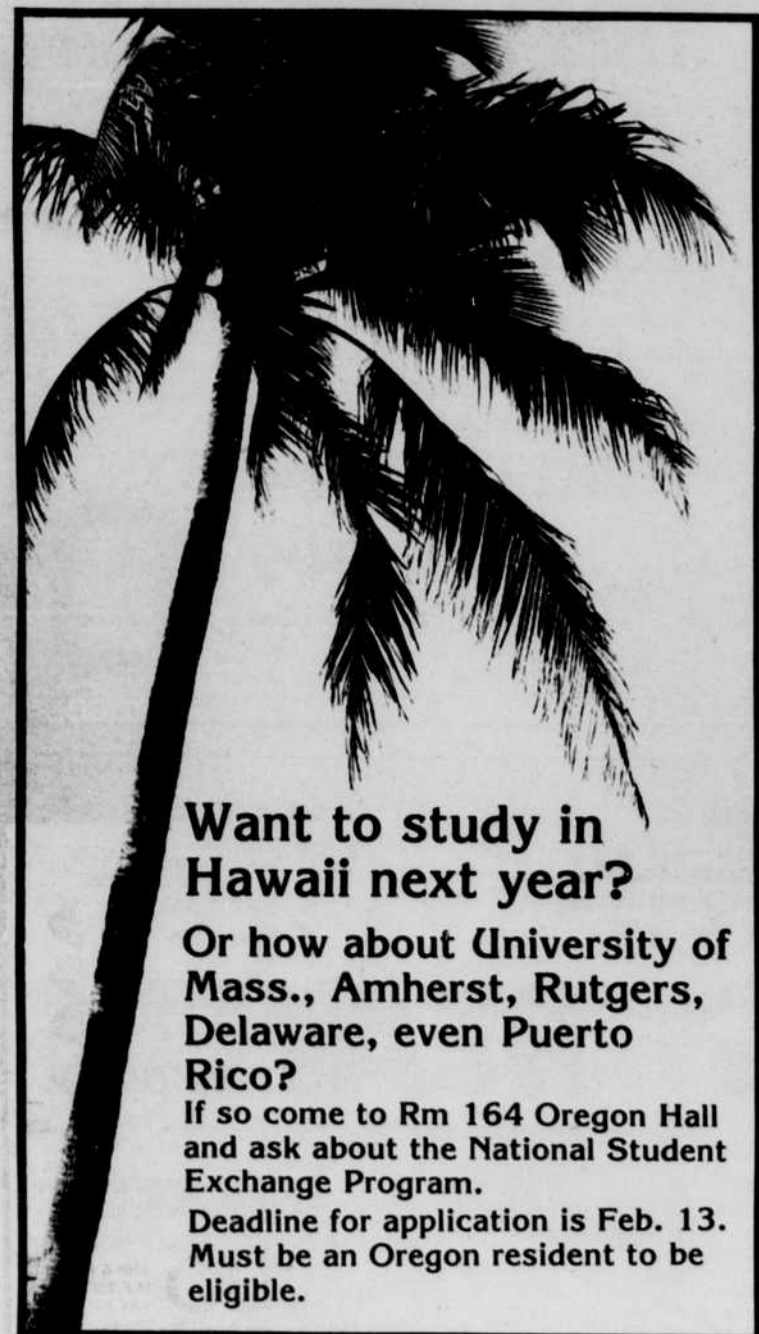
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Inexperience and lack of protective clothing account for most injuries in scooter accidents.

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