

# TESTING OUR LIMITS

Protecting Freedoms Through Sound Education **By Bob Laford**

In 2013, the Red Knights received a sound meter grant from the AMA. As the group's assistant state representative for Massachusetts, I wanted to share some data and anecdotal stories of our experience with the sound equipment.

My guesses on how many motorcyclists I would cross paths with at functions was close to the actuality in the field. Between my chapter's Massachusetts events and the Red Knights' International Convention held in Rutland, Vt., in August, I estimate that the sound testing was made available to about 800 riders.

What surprised me was the small percentage of riders who took advantage of the testing. I did about 60 actual tests. I spoke with at least three times that many, so the sound testing sites did draw interest and allowed some valuable discussions—but getting riders to bring their bikes in for a review was sometimes like pulling teeth!

One fellow came out and said that if he had his bike tested he could no longer “play dumb” about how loud it was. One story to share is that the two loudest bikes at 112 db were not American-made V-twins, as many might presume. One was a sport bike, and the other was a 750cc Japanese cruiser.

Of course, none of the loud bikes were stock. In fact, if I learned anything it was that if a bike remains stock, it remains within



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acceptable limits. It's worth noting that every Harley-Davidson I tested that had stock pipes was within limits. Many of the aftermarket exhausts were also within limits.

There was one specific test that I performed that made the AMA's investment, and my time, worthwhile. The 750cc Japanese

cruiser that tested at 112 decibels belonged to a 17-year old who had just received his license, and this was his first bike. He, his father and I had a lengthy conversation about the public's perception of motorcycles and the restrictions being placed on us because of the actions of a small percentage of the riders. What made the biggest impression was when the conversation turned to hearing loss.

As a 30-year firefighter/EMT, I have some occupational hearing loss, and as a safety professional I know that hearing protection is invaluable in saving our hearing. By the time the pair headed off on their rides, the father had made a decision to see that a more acceptable exhaust be placed on his son's bike. That encounter was a success.

In all cases, I'm confident the availability of the of the testing encouraged all riders to think a bit more about how sound plays a role in the freedoms we enjoy as riders, and the role sound might play in our loss of those freedoms.

*Feedback on excessive sound? Email [submissions@ama-cycle.org](mailto:submissions@ama-cycle.org).*