



# Riding SMART!

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## Join SMARTER

### **Individual dues**

\$25/annually  
\$65/3 years

**Joint-members dues**  
(2-person household)

\$35/annually  
\$90/3 years

**Organizational dues**  
\$100/annually

## President's News & Views

### Remembering and Honoring Donald L. Smith, Ph.D.



Dr. Don Smith, Professor Emeritus Michigan State University, died on November 8, 2021. He was 93-years-old.

Don had a 50-year career of service to the Michigan highway traffic and motorcyclist safety communities. He was the driving force behind the creation and 2007 incorporation of the Skilled Motorcyclist Association - Responsible, Trained and Educated Riders, Inc. ([www.SMARTER-usa.org](http://www.SMARTER-usa.org)). Dr. Smith was the chair of the board of directors of SMARTER from its inception until January 2013, when he relinquished his

chairmanship and accepted the vice-chair position, saying the chairman's role was better suited for an active motorcyclist. He was serving as SMARTER's vice-chair at the time of his death.

In 1971 Dr. Smith joined the Michigan State University College of Engineering, Highway Traffic Safety Center (HTSC). His influence in driver education and motorcycle rider education began immediately. In 1972 he created the Michigan Rider Education Program and conducted the first motorcyclist safety classes held in the state.

In 1973 the Motorcycle Industry Council (MIC) recognized the need to improve the image of motorcycling and embarked on a program of motorcycle rider education. The early efforts of MIC were focused on developing curricula and training instructors by utilizing traffic safety education faculty at the existing traffic safety centers of eight universities, with the MSU HTSC being one of the locations. Professor Don Smith was assigned the responsibility for the MSU program. He was then selected by MIC as a consultant in the development of the first MIC/MSF Beginning Rider Course and the initial Motorcycle Rider Skill Test.

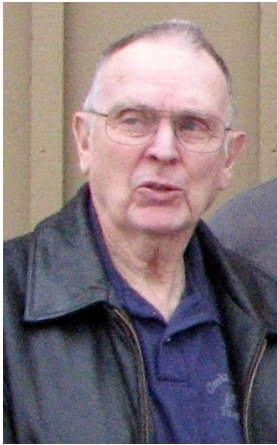
Motorcycle rider instructors were recruited from the ranks of driver education instructors and training was through college credit courses. Don once recalled "Very few had ridden a motorcycle, so I was teaching them how to ride as well as how to use the Beginning Rider Course curriculum."

He did all of this prior to MSF's development of a system of instructor training and training of trainers. Only later did he attend MSF training to officially become a "chief instructor."

**A man of strong principles and decisive action**

In response to the Motorcycle Safety Foundation giving its highest national award to a biker rights advocate who opposed all-rider motorcycle helmet laws, Don cut up his chief instructor card and sent it back to MSF in 1991/92.

The same year Don joined MSU HTSC, Richard H. Austin became Michigan's Secretary of State. Michigan had enacted an all-rider motorcycle helmet law in 1967 to comply with U.S. Department of Transportation requirements for obtaining federal funds. The law was repealed in 1968 and reinstated in 1969. Michigan's biker rights organization opposed a mandatory helmet law, so SOS Austin and Dr. Smith took up the torch on behalf of maintaining Michigan's life-saving all-rider motorcycle helmet law. A decades long battle began.



Austin and Smith worked side by side in their strong advocacy for maintaining Michigan's lifesaving all-rider helmet law. Austin would become known as "Mr. Traffic Safety" and Smith would be repeatedly recognized for his leadership and contributions to Michigan traffic safety. Austin's tenure as Michigan's longest serving SOS would end in 1994 and Dr. Don Smith would retire from MSU the same year.

When Don started teaching motorcyclist safety courses in the early 1970's, he was not a motorcycle rider, but he soon became one and riding became a lifelong enjoyment.

When he told his sister "I just bought a beemer" it took a little explanation for her to learn he was not talking about a sports car. SMARTER Board Chair Rich Henrion, a dedicated BMW rider, acted as Don's buyer consultant.

From Rich Henrion: *"Don said that he wanted to purchase a motorcycle for commuting and still have it be travel worthy to take longer rides and trips. I selected a 1987 BMW K75T. It was a sharp three-cylinder fuel injected "Caribic Blue" motorcycle with a quality sized windshield and removable saddlebags. It fit Don perfectly and he rode it with a smile on his face.*

*In 1989, Don rode this BMW to an MSF National Conference in Charlotte, NC with other Chief Instructors from Michigan. At one stop on the Blue Ridge Parkway, Don had to pee so bad that he pulled off into a rest area and didn't get the side stand fully extended before he dismounted. No harm. The motorcycle rested on its side in the grass as Don ran for the roadside restroom.*

*It was ten years later, 1999, when Don said he had aged out of riding and wanted to sell the motorcycle. The catch was the only person he would sell it to was me (Rich.) He insisted that I purchase it at an embarrassingly low price. He practically gave it to me. I put 50,000 miles on that motorcycle."*



After selling the big BMW to Rich, Don purchased a 1990 Honda VTR 250. He was consulting with attorneys and acting as an expert witness in motorcyclist crash cases and he knew it was important for his credibility to be a motorcycle owner and licensed rider. He would later donate this motorcycle to SMARTER.



**Because of the VTR's very good condition and somewhat cult following, its sale provided a significant contribution to SMARTER - one of many financial contributions Don made to sustaining the 501c3 motorcyclist safety education association.**

Tom Hampton was Michigan's first Rider Education Coordinator with the Michigan Department of Education (MDOE). Don wrote about the early years of his involvement in rider education: "Tom was on the staff at MSP headquarters, I don't recall what his job entailed. The Department of Education posted the m/c consultant position in '79 and Tom was selected. His first instructions were "go see Don Smith," and the rest is history. Tom and I attended all kinds of m/c functions, distributing flyers about m/c training. We had PSAs on MI TV."

Michigan's law requiring rider training for new riders under age 18 and providing funding for such training went into effect in 1982. The legislation created a large influx of 16- and 17-year-old students. Don at MSU, and Tom at MDOE, jointly conducted both instructor and rider training courses in 1982 to 84 with Tom acquiring sponsors to conduct the rider courses at various sites around the state and Don at MSU training instructors for the respective sites. In 1984, MSU conducted 23 motorcyclist rider courses at 15 sites. Other sites with certified instructors were also beginning to sponsor rider courses.

Again, from Don's writing: "When the m/c law got going, it was obvious I couldn't keep up with the instructor classes. I already had a full academic load and a fleet supervisor training program. Was I ever glad when he (Tom) convinced Rich to handle instructor training."

The Rich Don refers to is Rich Henrion. Rich, from Norway MI, became an MSF instructor in 1980 and by 1985 was preparing to attend Chief Instructor school. An Instructor Preparation (IP) course was scheduled for Iron Mountain, MI where Don would be the chief instructor and Rich would act as assistant/apprentice prior to attending the MSF Chief Instructor school.

Dan Petterson, current SMARTER President and CEO, had been recruited by Mr. Jon Twork, who was coordinating a rider training program out of West Shore Community College, Scottville/Ludington, MI to attend this IP. The core of SMARTER's first board of directors in 2007 came together with that 1985 IP in Iron Mountain - Jon Twork, Dan Petterson, Rich Henrion, Tom Hampton and Dr. Don Smith were all founding SMARTER board members.





***Dr. Don Smith, left, and Dr. Ray Ochs, MSF Vice-President of Training Systems, during the SMARTER sponsored Ride Smart 2010 conference***

One might think that motorcycle rider training was Dr. Smith's entire focus as a leader with MSU's Traffic Safety Center, however, he was just as active (maybe even more so) in driver education. Michigan was the first state to pass a driver education law and the first state to establish a Highway Traffic Safety Center. Soon after joining MSU, Don became a member of the Michigan Driver Traffic Safety Education Association (MDTSEA). At a MDTSEA meeting in 1971, Secretary of State, Richard H. Austin asked Dr. Smith, and other members of MDTSEA, to annually review and edit the Michigan Department of State (MDOS) booklet entitled, "What Every Driver Must Know." Don and Tom Hampton also wrote and revised the motorcyclist version of the booklet titled Michigan Motorcycle Operator Manual and both were pictured on the front cover of an early edition.

MDTSEA is a state affiliate of the American DTSEA. In 1979, after serving five years on the ADTSEA Executive Board, Dr. Smith spent his final two years on the board as the 23rd ADTSEA President.

Don was awarded the following honors from the MDTSEA:

- 1976 – Silvernail Award. This award is the highest MDTSEA honor named after Leslie Silvernail, an early assistant director of the MSU HTSC. The purpose of this award is to recognize persons throughout the country who have made outstanding contributions to traffic safety education.
- 1978 – Distinguished Achievement Award
- 1981 – The President's Award. Established in 1973, this award is to be given to the individual who, in the President's estimation, has given outstanding service to the Association and the service has been a key to the Association's accomplishments.
- 1993 – Long Term Service to Traffic Safety presented to Dr. Smith by Secretary of State, Richard H. Austin
- 1994 – Granted honorary membership for long term service and dedication
- 2004 - Dr. Gustafson Award. The recipient of this award must have been involved in traffic safety and/or driver education for more than 25 years; and must have made recognizable contributions to the fields throughout their years of service.

In addition to all of this, Don was an active Salvation Army volunteer, ringing the bell, counting money and delivering meals in the community. He was recognized by the East Lansing area Salvation Army as its longest serving volunteer. He was deeply disappointed when his doctor instructed him to stop meal deliveries in 2020 because of his advanced age and vulnerability of COVID infection.



Left, SMARTER Vice-Chair Dr. Don Smith and Board Chair, Rich Henrion accept a plaque from the National Association of State Motorcycle Safety Administrators (SMSA) in recognition of SMARTER's support of the SMSA 2019 national conference held in Grand Rapids, MI

Presidents News and Views

We will be posting this special edition on our website and will share the link on our Facebook page. Memories may be shared at:

https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/east-lansing-mi/donald-smith-10439825?utm\_source=obit\_alerts&utm\_medium=email&utm\_campaign=obit\_detail&utm\_content=view\_updates\_button

Don's niece has written a beautiful remembrance posted at this site.

DAN



Donations from all sources are the lifeblood of SMARTER. Without financial support, SMARTER could not exist. SMARTER worked hard to become recognized as a 501(c)(3) tax exempt public charity, and all donations are deductible to the full extent allowed by law.



Please consider donating to SMARTER. Enclose this form with your check payable to SMARTER Inc. and mail to the address provided. Your contribution is tax deductible as allowed by law, and your support is greatly appreciated!

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