

Calif. Ponders Gagging 'Obnoxious' Motorcycles

Daisy Nguyen, Associated Press Writer

CALABASAS, Calif. (AP) — The laid-back vibe of this affluent Los Angeles suburb gets a jarring wakeup on weekends when hundreds of motorcycles thunder through the Santa Monica Mountains, triggering car alarms, rattling windows and jolting alive barking dogs.

"They rev their engines with complete disregard for the people who live here," complained neighborhood resident Tonia Aery. "It's obnoxious."

Aery's wish for peace and quiet could come true after the state Senate passed a bill this month that would make it a motor vehicle violation to ride a roaring hog. The only catch is that the decision now falls to the state's biker-in-chief, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, an avid motorcyclist.

Schwarzenegger's fellow riders — still bitter over an 18-year-old state law requiring helmets — are hoping he'll veto the law.

The bill targets motorcyclists who remove factory-installed emission control devices mandated by the U.S. government and replace them with custom, after-market parts that often make their bikes louder — and, consequently, dirtier. If passed, motorcycles would be required to bear the proper U.S. Environmental Protection Agency label certifying that the exhaust system is clean burning and does not exceed 80 decibels — about the same as a vacuum cleaner.

At least six cities, including Denver, Boston and the state of Oregon have passed similar noise-prevention laws, but muffling motorcycles here could have symbolic impact.

The Hells Angels started here, so did the raucous motorcycle rallies in Hollister that inspired "The Wild One," the 1953 Marlon Brando movie that cemented bikers' rebellious image in American pop culture.

"It's another example of government intrusion into our lifestyle," said Mike Levison, president of the Southern California Harley Riders Association.

The bill by Sen. Fran Pavley would fine first-time offenders up to \$100, but their ticket could be voided if they make corrections. Subsequent infractions would be subject to fines of \$100 to \$250.

For years, residents in Pavley's district have complained about bikes that rumble along Pacific Coast Highway and echo through the twisting canyons of Malibu, Calabasas and Agoura Hills.

Last year, Pavley, D-Agoura Hills, tried to close a loophole in the state law that

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exempts motorcycles from pollution standards by mandating smog inspections every two years. Vocal motorcyclists helped defeat the bill so she amended it to target noise. If signed, the bill will effectively make the state's 826,000 registered motorcycles meet air pollution requirements by meeting noise standards.

Federal and state laws that limit motorcycle noise already exist, but Pavley said enforcement is lax because it's impractical to outfit police with noise-monitoring instruments.

"It's already illegal to modify the pipe to make your bike louder," Pavley said. "So this is not a new law, it's enforcement of an existing law."

California Highway Patrol Officer Leland Tang, whose Woodland Hills office regularly fields complaints about noisy bikes, noted that state law prohibits drivers from modifying their cars' exhaust system to make the engine louder. But bikers can dodge the ordinance because the Bureau of Automotive Repair, which inspects vehicles to ensure their exhaust systems are in compliance, is not set up to inspect motorcycles.

Bikers fear the legislation would put a crimp in more than their tailpipes and could prevent them from customizing their motorcycles because makers of aftermarket parts — faced with the daunting task of having to list every make and model their parts can be used for — could go out of business.

"We're never going to advocate breaking the law, what we're trying to advocate is reasonable choices to allow consumers to customize their vehicles," said Imre Szauter, government affairs manager for American Motorcyclist Association.

Pavley said the EPA stamp will be required for motorcycles made after 2013, giving enough time for parts makers to comply.

Even motorcyclists known for sounding off on their boisterous peers think the new law is a bad idea.

"This bill doesn't directly address the noise issue, it just regulates what you can purchase for your bike," said Don Amador, whose Quiet Warrior Riding consulting firm advocates riding with sound-compliant equipment. He suggests that authorities adopt a decibel test to measure actual noise output.

Schwarzenegger, who has until Sept. 30 to decide, has not taken a position on the legislation, said spokesman Aaron McLear. The governor, whose most famous movie image depicts him as gun-toting, motorcycle-riding cyborg in "The Terminator" series, has a bike collection and sometimes rides around the Malibu hills with his pals.

McLear said he didn't know if Schwarzenegger's motorcycles meet federal noise requirements.

The bill's not the first time Schwarzenegger has faced the prospect of being in the

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hot saddle over something that would affect his lifestyle. Earlier this year, the governor known for puffing on expensive cigars vetoed legislation that would have banned smoking at all California state parks and beaches. He said the bill crossed the line of government intrusion.

On the other hand, Schwarzenegger received environmental kudos for signing Pavley's landmark global warming law imposing stronger regulations on greenhouse gas emissions.

Mike Levison, the Harley rider, said he gets annoyed by loud hogs, but thinks peer pressure's a better way to quiet loud bikes. In the past, he's banished loud bikes to the back of the pack.

"Guys revving up their noisy pipes remind me of my 8-year-old grandson. Every time he jumps in the pool he yells 'Hey Grandpa, look at me! Look at me!'" the retired businessman said. "They're making noise to get attention. It's no wonder the public has come down on us because of these idiots."

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