

# Remembering a Motorcycle Training Visionary

## Ronald Edward Shepard

March 30, 1946 – February 20, 2008

By David L. Hough, #18259

Ronald E. “Ron” Shepard, the renowned administrator of Idaho’s motorcycle safety program, died suddenly of heart failure at his home on February 20, 2008. He was 61. Although Ron Shepard was not a BMW rider, his efforts impact all motorcyclists in one way or another. More than a few BMW riders are instructors, and many of our state rider training programs exist only because of Ron’s efforts. If you have taken a rider training course, it’s likely that Ron was involved in it.

The funeral procession from the Vineyard Christian Fellowship church in Boise to the Idaho State Veterans Cemetery was a graphic reminder of the many different facets of Ron’s life. The procession was escorted by a large number of Idaho State Police motor officers, their seriousness making it clear they were present because they knew Ron personally and respected his work. Most of the officers blocking traffic for the huge contingent of motorcyclists and others rode BMW authority bikes. The long columns of motorcycles were a symbol of rights groups such as the Idaho Coalition for Motorcycle Safety who had been instrumental in getting the legislation passed to set up rider training programs. The military committal services at the veterans cemetery conducted by an honor guard of the U. S. Air Force were a reminder that Shepard had served in the USAF for many years.

Few of Shepard’s motorcycling associates knew that during the Vietnam War he had been a member of a special “downed pilot recovery team,” with the difficult task of extricating bodies from crashed aircraft in order to return the final remains to grieving relatives for burial in stateside cemeteries. That dangerous and emotionally draining assignment was followed by a long career in motorcycle safety.



*Ron Shepard the coach.*

The military has long had a problem with young servicemen riding motorcycles off duty and having serious, often fatal, crashes. Shepard represented the Air Force on a team that developed a motorcycle training film to help stem the

carnage. That led to Ron’s next assignment to manage the Air Force’s worldwide motorcycle safety program. He became a Motorcycle Safety Foundation (MSF) certified instructor in 1974, and a Chief Instructor in 1985.

Shepard retired from the Air Force as a master sergeant in 1987, to take a position as Manager of Education with the Motorcycle Safety Foundation. His role was to help structure state motorcycle safety programs nationwide, and to assist motorcyclists in getting legislation passed to set up such programs. While at the MSF, Ron helped establish and organize the National Association of State Motorcycle Safety Administrators (SMSA), and later, from 2002 to 2004, he served as its president.

While at the MSF headquarters in California, Ron met, courted, and married Beth Weaver. Then, when their efforts became stalled by the political and leadership turmoil engulfing the MSF in the



*The motorcade of bikes.*

mid-1990s, Ron and Beth both retired from the MSF. Ron accepted a position as Idaho's first state motorcycle safety administrator. He not only administered the STAR program, but enthusiastically took on whatever tasks were necessary to keep the program humming—counseling instructors, pounding the training range, or cajoling politicians for funding.

Shepard had not been in ill health, so his sudden death was an extreme shock for the Idaho STAR (Skills Training Advantage for Riders) program. However, Shepard had spent years building a cadre of highly trained and enthusiastic instructors, so there is no doubt the STAR program will continue and flourish.

One of the reasons for Ron's success in motorcycle safety is that he knew motorcycling. Ron was an enthusiast and a very skilled rider. He loved motorcycles and riding them, sometimes aggressively; sometimes just to pull stunts on his riding buddies. He was an outstanding trainer, mentor, and coach. Because of his enthusiasm for motorcycling, he knew what would work and what wouldn't work. He also had a contagious sense of humor, sometimes forming pseudo-motorcycle events such as the "Ain't Going to Sturgis" ride. He also had a number of legendary tall tales of motorcycling adventures that were loosely based on fact. Ron was well respected by his colleagues in the motorcycle safety industry, and he will be missed.

If you would like to return something to motorcycle safety in Ron Shepard's name, you can make a donation to the Idaho STAR Program at Boise State University, 1910 University Drive, Boise, ID 83725-2005.

## F800 Up for the Cup

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over four rounds—Kyalami, East London, Port Elizabeth and Cape Town—where the riders from the Cape and Highveld will get to go head-to-head for overall South African glory.

Because affordability is key to any one-make race series, BMW South Africa is offering an attractive deal to those intending to participate in the championship, with special prices available for a fully road legal F800S. It then needs to be prepared for the racetrack, with full fairing, race pipe, rear-set footpegs and crash bobbins.

BMW Motorrad South Africa's Rob Barnes comments: "Although BMW Motorrad is not directly involved in the race series it fully supports the initiative of our Western Cape Dealers, Particularly Atlantic Motorrad. Their commitment to the sporting heritage of the BMW brand has ensured that the exciting F800S will be seen as a formidable motorcycle on South Africa's racetracks."

The championships kick off this month and about 40 F800 riders are expected at each round. Rumour has it that BMW Motorrad USA's Nate Kern will also put in a guest appearance at one of the races, so let's hope he can keep up with the locals. The racing will be close, hard-fought and undoubtedly exciting!



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