

trail bike initiative

research executive summary

Background

From 2004 to 2008, sales of trail bikes and related "off-road" motorcycles increased by more than 50%. This increase in trail bike use of public land has increased conflict between trail bikes, the environment, rural residents and other forest users. As part of the State Government's \$5 million Trail Bike Initiative, which aims to bring trail bike use of public land onto a more sustainable footing, the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) commissioned research to investigate the knowledge and attitudes of Victorian trail bike riders and the motorcycle retail industry.

Little was known about perceptions and motivations of trail bike riders when using public land, so the research aimed to:

- Provide a comprehensive analysis of trail bike riders' and retailers' motivations and behaviours
- Enhance understanding of the barriers and drivers likely to impact on initiatives and measures developed by DSE
- Recommend strategies on how to engage riders to improve environmental and social outcomes

Conducted from December 2008 to May 2009, the research used a variety of methods to capture trail bike rider and retailer opinion. This included:

- 20 one-on-one interviews
- 13 focus groups in metropolitan and regional Victoria, with 87 participants
- An online survey with 680 respondents
- Telephone interviews with 53 motorcycle retailers
- Six interviews with community members

**ride for
tomorrow**
respect the environment respect others

Key findings

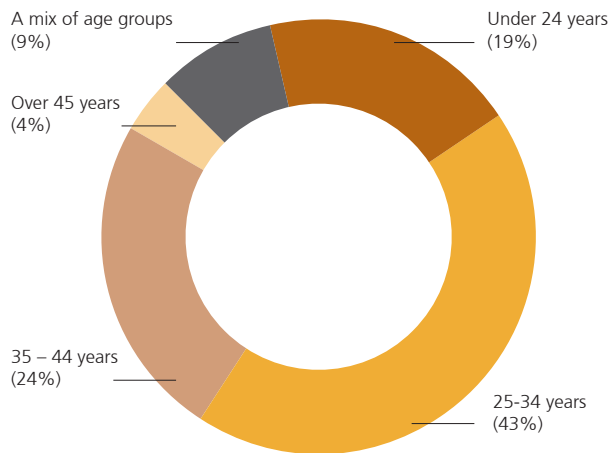
Areas of public land respondents rode their trail bike in past 12 months

1	Inner South West	17%
2	Inner North West	19%
3	Inner North East	21%
4	Inner South East	30%
5	Outer South West	18%
6	Outer North West	17%
7	Outer North East	17%
8	Outer South East	23%

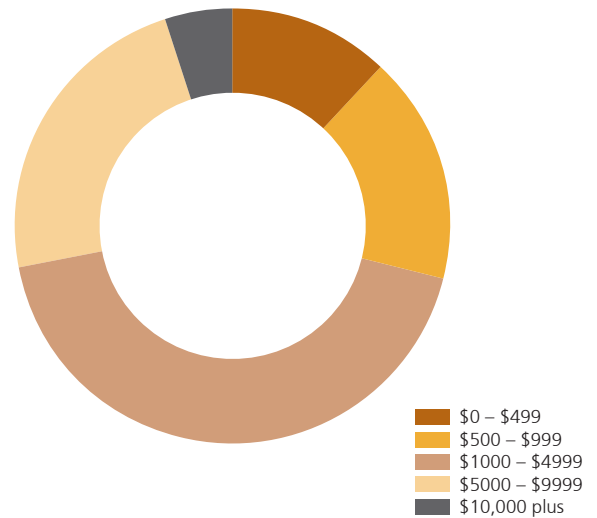


Key findings (continued)

Age of trail bike riders



How much they paid for trail bike



Who they ride with

2 to 5 riders	83%
6 to 9 riders	8%
Alone	7%
10+ riders	2%
Close friends	71%
Casual friends	33%
My children	20%
Brother/sister	20%
Parent/aunt/uncle	8%
Club members	8%
Online riding buddy	7%
Other	5%

How often/long ride on public land

Once a month	28%
Once every 2 months	22%
Once a fortnight	22%
Less than once every 2 months	21%
Once a week	7%
2 to 4 hours	56%
4 to 8 hours	27%
Less than 2 hours	13%
2 days	2%
More than 2 days	1%

The majority of riders reported they were sympathetic to the needs of other forest users and residents, and were aware of the need to respect the environment and limit exhaust noise emissions.

Specifically:

- A majority of riders agreed limiting noise was important (71%) and excess noise gave riders a bad name (68%)
- 82% thought different forest users should get along and 78% said they would not ride in certain areas if they knew they were susceptible to environmental damage
- Most agreed trail bikes could be irritating to other forest users (76%). There was particular empathy for horse riders (80%) and walkers (72%)
- Of those riders who had received an infringement notice while riding, the most common offence was riding single track¹ (34%)
- Most (72%) said they had a standard exhaust as supplied by the manufacturer, with 51% disagreeing that a noisier bike was safer either for the rider or other forest users
- 71% of riders were willing to work with DSE to find solutions to current problems

However, some of the key impediments to change identified were:

- Ignorance of existing laws. Many riders (41%) did not understand the laws on where to legally ride
- Lack of available information on where to ride and a reported lack of clarity and consistency on rules and regulations
- Many riders (45%) do not properly display a number plate, arguing they are too easily lost or damaged and are a danger to the rider in a fall
- Riders have an established set of values enabling them to rationalise their illegal behaviour, including denying responsibility ("I have nowhere else to ride"), denying their impact ("My bike's a 2 stroke - you can't hear it from more than 50 metres away") or denying their environmental impact ("It's the 4WDs that do all the damage")

What DSE will do with the research

The research recommended four key areas that could help reduce conflict over trail bike use of public land. The key areas and DSE's responses are:

1. Reciprocity

- Constructing 12 purpose built trail bike visitor areas in state forest where cars with trailers can safely unload trail bikes. These areas typically include information boards, a toilet and a shelter. So far, areas have been built in Gippsland (near Powelltown, Neerim, Licola and Erica), in the North East (near Stanley), in the North West (near Avoca) and in the South West (in the Otways, near Lancefield and near Smythesdale).
- Providing signposted riding routes for riders new to the area
- Providing downloadable information sheets with maps and an interactive web-based mapping product Forest Explorer Online, where riders can create their own maps to help plan their rides
- Online videos with tips to improve riding techniques
- Running tag-along tours for riders lead by qualified licensed tour operators
- Developing a trail bike riding code

2. Getting serious on enforcement

DSE has rolled out an enforcement program to reduce illegal behaviour. This program is focused on where residents, other forest users or the environment are being impacted by illegal trail bike riding activity. DSE has:

- Implemented a trail bike compliance strategy
- Provided specialist trail bike compliance training to more than 80 Authorised Officers
- Organised for more than 30 Authorised Officers to be accredited to ride trail bikes when conducting operations
- Increased its enforcement capacity, including patrols conducted on trail bikes, and operations run jointly with Victoria Police and other agencies. Based on these patrols in 2009, more than 90% of trail bikes ridden in state forests and parks are registered, compared to 2006, when the figure was estimated at 70%
- Developed an EPA approved noise testing regime, with reporting of infringements to the EPA for compliance/prosecution
- Initiated a review of existing penalties and the need for tougher penalties to serve as a greater deterrent to illegal behaviour

3. Debunking myths

- Conducting acoustic tests on noise emissions from different types of trail bikes and mufflers, to better gauge the impacts of trail bike noise on nearby residents. More than 800 trail bikes have already been tested
- Creating Reduce Noise Areas, which will be shown on DSE maps and signs near residential and picnic/camping areas to make it clear to riders when they are entering noise sensitive areas
- Releasing educational information on the impacts trail bike riding can have on the environment, on rural residents and on other forest users

4. Build trust

- Improving consultation with riders on issues affecting them, such as increased public discussion about road or track closures
- Providing more face-to-face contact between DSE and riders
- Improving information available to riders via the DSE website and brochures distributed through motorcycle dealerships
- Attending major trail bike events

1 Single track – Refers to predominantly narrow forest trails (often single wheel width) favoured by trail bike riders which are not useable/passable by four-wheeled vehicles. The creation and use of such tracks by motorised vehicles (ie. trail bikes and/or 4WD's) is illegal on Victorian public land.

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