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Pocket Bikes Popular at Christmas, Unpopular and Hazardous on the Roads

With the holiday sales of pocket bikes (minibikes resembling small motorcycles) expected to be high this season, the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) is joining a highway safety group representing state motor vehicle and law enforcement agencies nationwide to urge consumers, parents and retailers to heed the safety warnings with these toys and learn the state laws and local ordinances governing their operation on public roads.

“In most cases, it is unlawful to operate one of these “pocket bikes” on state, county or city maintained roads,” said Linda R. Lewis-Pickett, president and CEO, American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA). “Children and their parents who fail to learn or choose to ignore their local and state ordinances regarding these toys might receive an unwanted Christmas gift: a traffic citation.”

In Texas, most of these small, inexpensive vehicles are not considered roadworthy and therefore are not registered or titled, which means they are not legal to drive on public roads. TxDOT also warns that these toys can be dangerous and life threatening. Unlike the bigger bikes they emulate, pocket bikes often lack basic safety features like rearview mirrors, lights and turn signals, and do not meet minimum state safety requirements. And recently, the World Against Toys Causing Harm (WATCH www.toysafety.org), a consumer group, ranked the Pocket Rocket Miniature Motorcycle as one of the “10 Worst Toys of 2004.”

“These pocket bikes are classified as toys,” said Mike Behrens, TxDOT executive director. “And unlike registered ‘motor vehicles,’ these toys do not belong on our roadways. If riders do not behave responsibly and obey traffic laws, they may pay heavily with a trip to the emergency room.”

According to Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates, there were 2,345 emergency room visits related to minibikes in 2003.

In addition, consumers should be aware these toys can reach very high speeds. Some pocket bikes are capable of reaching speeds up to 50 miles per hour.

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To ensure a safe and legal holiday season, AAMVA recommends that users, purchasers, and sellers of these toys consider the following facts before taking to the road:

- Research local ordinances and licensing requirements for these toys. Many municipalities authorize their use only on private property and ban them from public roadways, parking lots and sidewalks. In some instances, riders may have to hold a motorcycle license, register and insure the vehicle, have it inspected, or be 16 years of age to operate the bike.
- Never operate a pocket bike in traffic.
- Pocket bikes are low to the ground, making it difficult for motorists to see. Injuries and deaths have resulted from mixing cars and pocket bikes.
- Insurance policies may not cover accidents involving these toys.
- An adult should closely supervise children operating these toys.
- Always wear a helmet. According to a study by the National Safe Kids Campaign, less than half of children observed on wheeled vehicles wear a helmet.

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