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FROM ROUGH-AND-TOUGH HARLEY TRIKES TO ECO-FRIENDLY AUTOCYCLES, COMPANIES ARE CREATING MORE AND MORE THREE-WHEEL VEHICLES EACH DAY. QUESTIONS ABOUT REGISTERING THE VEHICLES HAVE STARTED POPPING UP ACROSS THE COUNTRY. LUCKILY, AAMVA DECIDED TO ANSWER THEM.

BY JAMIE FRIEDLANDER

A few years ago, drivers began seeing odd, futuristic-looking vehicles on the road. Not quite a car, but not quite a motorcycle. These vehicles had three wheels—either two in the front and one in the rear, or two in the back and one in the front—and some even had complete enclosures like a car.

Drivers of these three-wheel vehicles would visit their local DMV to register them, only to be met with confused stares and questions from DMV workers. Should they be registered as motorcycles or cars? As these three-wheel vehicles have become more common, AAMVA knew it had to do something to help solve the nationwide confusion. And so, in 2010, AAMVA created the Three-Wheel Vehicle Working Group (3WVWG).

The 11 members of the Working Group come from various disciplines, such as vehicle registration, law enforcement, and drivers license and control. The committee—composed of members from Hawaii, to Oregon, to Virginia—began meeting regularly to discuss best practices for regulating three-wheel vehicles. In October 2013, the group published the *Best Practices for the Regulation of Three-Wheel Vehicles*.

“Mostly, jurisdictions just needed something to look to, something solid,” says Becky Renninger, the Three-Wheel Vehicle Working Group chair and an operations and policy analyst with the Oregon Department of Motor Vehicles. “We didn’t have consistent, standardized material to go by, and that’s really necessary in order for us to do our job properly.”

The group began meeting both electronically and in-person to discuss best practices for the regulation of three-wheel vehicles. According to Captain Ronnie Saunders, a member of the group and an officer with the Virginia State Police, the group created a cohesive document that had input from nearly every corner of the motor vehicle world.

“It really was a moving entity where we listened and we explained our thoughts on how we should put together the document,” says Saunders. “Everybody played a part in it.”

CLASSIFYING THREE-WHEEL VEHICLES

The first task the Three-Wheel Vehicle Working Group set out to complete was properly identifying what a three-wheel vehicle is. They created two groups for classifying three-wheel vehicles: three-wheel motorcycles and autocycles. Three-wheel

motorcycles have handlebars, and the operator straddles or sits astride the motorcycle. Autocycles, on the other hand, have an enclosure, a steering wheel and the operator sits in a seat.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) has classified autocycles as motorcycles, and therefore they must pass the same safety tests as motorcycles—despite having an enclosure. However, NHTSA is currently reviewing safety standards and classifications for three-wheel vehicles due to various safety concerns.

According to Cathie Curtis, the Working Group liaison and the director of vehicle programs at AAMVA, three-wheel vehicles have become more prevalent for several reasons.

"They are fuel efficient, and some provide a little more stability," says Curtis. "As motorcycle operators age, some of them are finding they still want to ride a motorcycle, but they want a vehicle with more stability. So a three-wheel vehicle provides that for them. Also, many of what we classify as autocycles are fun vehicles that provide a unique driving experience."

Renninger echoes Curtis' statement, adding that cost is another prime reason three-wheel vehicles have become more popular in the market. "They're easy to park, they're fuel efficient, and they try to keep cost down," she says. "People are just going in that direction."

THE INS AND OUTS OF THE GUIDE

The Best Practices for the Regulation of Three-Wheel Vehicles guide is a succinct 15 pages. It outlines the nuances of different types of three-wheel vehicles. The guide also explains how to register the vehicles, test drivers who own them, and assign license plates.

In terms of vehicle registration, the group emphasized that jurisdictions should follow typical registration and title procedures but should differentiate between three-wheel vehicles in notation.

For three-wheel motorcycles, the guide suggests using "3W" for the body style. For autocycles, the guide suggests using "AU" for the body style. The Working Group also recommends that for both three-wheel motorcycles and autocycles, license plates measure a standard 7 inches by 4 inches. The notation will vary among states, according to Curtis, who says that one state has even imprinted the word autocycle right on the license plate.

Driver licensing proves to be a bit less clear-cut, as driving autocycles and three-wheel motorcycles require completely different skill sets.

"The Working Group believes that operating an autocycle demands the same skills that a person would need driving an



Top: The 2014 Elio by Elio Motors is an autocycle that is marketed as an efficient and practical form of transportation, with an average gas mileage of 84 mpg. Bottom: The T-REX 16S by Campagna Motors is a sporty autocycle with an in-line six-cylinder BMW engine of 1649cc.



Read Best Practices
for the Regulation of
Three-Wheel
Vehicles online at
[aamva.org/
Best-Practices-
and-Model-
Legislation.](http://aamva.org/Best-Practices-and-Model-Legislation)

automobile," says Curtis. "So the Working Group recommends that the operator of an autocycle be licensed to operate a passenger vehicle." The group did recommend, however, that someone taking his or her first-ever driving test do so in a four-wheel automobile and then transition to an autocycle.

For three-wheel motorcycles, the guide recommends a different test than that for two-wheel motorcycle operators, as each requires a different skillset.

"Driving a two-wheel motorcycle is very different than driving a three-wheel motorcycle," says Scott Shenk, a member of the Working Group and division chief of driver licensing at PennDOT. "You steer differently and you need different balancing skills. So those differences are why we recommended different types of licensing restrictions depending on what type of motorcycle you drive."



FOR ALL

Before getting involved with the ins and outs of registering, licensing and issuing plates for three-wheel vehicles, get to know the defining features of each.

AUTOCYCLES

A newly coined term, an autocycle is a three-wheel vehicle (two wheels in the front or two in the back) that has an enclosure similar to a car. Autocycles differ from other three-wheel vehicles in that they have a traditional steering wheel and bucket seating. The T-REX is an example of one high-performance autocycle currently on the market. Some companies, such as Elio Motors and Zap Xebra, have begun introducing electric and eco-friendly autocycles as well.

Traditional Trike

A trike is defined as a three-wheel motorcycle that has one wheel in the front and two wheels in the back.

Reverse Trike

A reverse trike is defined as a three-wheel motorcycle that has two wheels in the front and one wheel in the back.

Sidecar Motorcycle

A sidecar motorcycle is defined as a three-wheel motorcycle that has a side compartment for a passenger. Sidecar motorcycles typically have two wheels in the back and one in the front.



Renninger adds that the guide makes recommendations specifically for three-wheel vehicles that meet federal standards for motorcycle safety and emissions—the guide does not apply to non-standard bikes that may come from other countries.

PROMOTING NATIONWIDE UNIFORMITY

The key benefit of jurisdictions implementing the best practices, according to the Working Group, is uniformity. By all states implementing similar registration and licensing procedures, drivers will not have difficulty taking their vehicles across state lines, and DMVs will not have trouble registering the vehicles.

The best practices guide also helps ensure that DMVs properly train drivers in their vehicle of choice. “Testing people and restricting them to the bike they tested on is a safety enhancement that can help reduce fatalities,” says Shenk.

Renninger also believes that once properly registering three-wheel vehicles becomes widespread, it will do wonders for crash analysis. “Right now, all the [three-wheel vehicles] are lumped together,” says Renninger. “So when you get statistics about any type of crash analysis, it includes all of them. The only way that we can start separating that out is for states to start incorporating some type of method to differentiate between them.”

While the benefits of implementing the group’s best practices abound, there is one challenge, according to Curtis, and that is legislation. Many jurisdictions cannot implement the changes until state laws have been amended and their internal policies and procedures changed. “And that takes time,” Curtis says. “The Working Group understands that these changes aren’t going to happen overnight. We hope jurisdictions adopt these changes when it is practical in their state, when they’re revising their current motorcycle laws or when they’re reviewing their policies and procedures.”

Renninger echoes that sentiment, suggesting that the Working Group understands that changes cannot be made by jurisdictions immediately. “There has been nothing out there,” she says. “So [it is important] for jurisdictions just to have an actual document they can refer to. States and jurisdictions have been looking for that type of document for quite some time. Even though all states may not jump on board and do every single thing, it’s something to strive for. It gives them something they can look at, something they can work toward.” **m**



Visit MOVEmag.org to watch a video and learn more about AAMVA’s best practices for the regulation of three-wheel vehicles.