

# IN THE WRITE

**W**HEN a filling station in Newtownards put up a sign saying that bikers had to pre-pay for their petrol before filling up, a local motorcycle club was rightly annoyed. They decided to take action and luckily for them, and indeed the rest of us, turned to two people who champion riders' rights.

Trevor Baird and Elaine Hardy took up the cause and helped win their case. The sign is now down and as a bonus for bikers in the province, they have launched a website, [www.writetoride.co.uk](http://www.writetoride.co.uk), aimed at speaking out and up for motorcyclists here. The site contains the first Write to Ride newsletter, the Spring issue.

In the foreword, Trevor, who was born here, says their objective is "simply to promote, protect and advance the interests of motorcycling in Northern Ireland". No better cause.

He says the representative voice of biking here is in a vacuum and that has left riders vulnerable to anyone who believes we have no right to be on the road. To my knowledge, no riders' group is still active. Trevor goes on: "This is a fact and the constant changes in laws from Europe and Westminster make it harder for riders to enjoy the simple pleasure of motorcycling. The greatest risk that riders' organisations face is forgetting their grass-root members and by getting too close to industry, too close to the orthodox views of government and research institutes that think they know better."

Trevor points out that with years of fighting in Westminster and Brussels, riders have learnt that knowledge is power – understanding how to walk in the corridors of power without compromise is an art form that takes years of skill and learning.

So what experience have Trevor and Elaine? He was the province's Motorcycle Action Group's regional representative before moving to Britain in 2002 to become a full-time employee of MAG, first as director of public affairs and then as general secretary.

During this time he was also a representative of the Federation of European Motorcyclists Associations, FEMA, which consists of 24 national riders' organisations drawn from 19 countries across Europe.

Six years later Trevor left MAG to become FEMA's technical officer, representing an international coalition of organisations from Europe and USA at the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.

It sounds heavy stuff but it has given him invaluable experience in that he's familiar with how governments and official bodies work and knows how to lobby and negotiate on behalf of motorcyclists.

Elaine, who holds a PHD, is Australian, joined MAG UK in 2003 and became the organisation's research



**Campaigners: Trevor Baird and Elaine Hardy, the duo behind the Write to Ride website**

## How one petrol station's dire treatment of bikers prompted a couple to fight for our rights with a 'site for two-wheelers

officer and also represented MAG UK at the FEMA from '04 to '07. Her background is vehicle data analysis and she has worked for many years with government agencies, especially in vehicle crime research. Again, many valuable skills.

The couple had been planning to set up the Write to Ride website but their involvement with the Newtownards petrol station issue forced them to bring



forward the launch. Seeing the sign come down at the station is proof of what intelligent lobbying can achieve.

Trevor says the station's supervisor said there was a problem with motorcyclists not paying but admitted this was minimal. He also admitted there were instances of car drivers not paying but as the bulk of his business was cars he couldn't ask all car drivers to pre-pay.

It was explained that pre-payment was difficult because the majority of bikers used debit or credit cards and tended to fill their tanks to the brim, it meant they could not know the exact amount to pay in advance.

This apparently did not wash with the supervisor, who said they should get their petrol elsewhere.

As Trevor says: "However, what annoyed us about the notice was the possible reaction of other people and what they might think of bikers after reading the sign on the petrol pumps, which implied that all motorcyclists are potentially dishonest customers."

"Riders come from all walks of life and ride a variety of motorcycles from custom, sports, touring and scooters, using them for various means from commuting to leisure and pleasure."

"Throughout the year motorcycle clubs, supported by individual riders, do their hardest to collect for charities and go about their legal and peaceful business."

A letter to the petrol station's HQ brought the following reply: "This sign was not sanctioned by head office and it is not our company policy. We have since instructed the branch to remove the signs which they have now done."

"We do hope you and your family now feel able to continue to shop with us and we would like to apologise for any inconvenience caused."

A very satisfactory conclusion. Trevor and Elaine have drawn up a list of subjects to be tackled. We wish them well in their work looking after bikers' interests here.