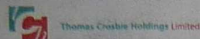


Evening Echo

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Fairness in cuts is vital for our recovery

WE'VE had some good news in recent days with announcements about jobs coming into the country and with an improvement in the Eurozone crisis as a result of the Greek debt deal.

The Government can take credit for staying calm in the face of an enormously challenging situation and there is reason to hope we can turn the corner.

Austerity is terrible, but we are told by the experts that it is necessary to correct our public finances.

However, the Government has a duty of care towards all the citizens and any indication that cuts and taxation are being applied in an unfair or destructive way must be corrected.

Families are our future, and the finding of an ESRI study that households with two adults and two children have suffered the most under austerity measures since 2008 is of great concern. These families experienced almost a 12% decrease in income, while a single retired person has only seen a 1.6% reduction in their income.

That is clearly wrong, and the Government must address it urgently — even without this statistic, it is evident that young families are struggling and that situation is bad for everyone. At this point though, the country is crying out for some lift in consumer spending and that will not come while families are under excessive pressure. On the positive side, if the Government can manage to ease that pressure, it will have benefits right across the economy and we might, at last, start to turn the corner.

A mild winter

WE'RE fairly good at complaining, and in recent times we've had plenty to crib about. However, one thing we can't whinge about right now is the weather. Parts of Cork were hotter than Tenerife yesterday with an unseasonably high temperature of 15°C.

Met Éireann confirmed that in Fermoy the mercury reached the dizzy heights of 15.5°C, while the Canary island only reached 14°C.

It's been a very good winter really, after some horrific ones — so let's count our blessings!

CÁTHAL POWER
examines the RSA's proposals to bring in mandatory hi-visibility clothing for motorcyclists and their pillion passengers.

THE Road Safety Authority believes that high-visibility clothing will bring down the number of collisions motorbikes are involved in on our roads. However, the majority of motorcyclists in this country disagree with this and do not believe that the wearing of Hi-Vis clothing should be mandatory.

I'm one of these people, your average guy, student, football fanatic, and keen motorcycle enthusiast. I ride my motorcycle everywhere, barely using public transportation nowadays. I even get ear sickness now! MAG Ireland, the Irish Motorcyclist's Action Group, believes that the wearing of Hi-Vis should not be compulsory as they believe it is not something that will stop fatalities and collisions involving motorbikes.

In November 2011, MAG Ireland conducted a survey on the Hi-Vis question. Over 90% of the 1,000 asked said they were completely against the motion, where as only 8% voted in favour and a further 0.6% said they were undecided yet.

The RSA state that 68% of collisions involving motorbikes in the last three years occurred during daylight hours when visibility and road conditions were good. They feel the number of bikers wearing Hi-Vis isn't high enough and that this is the reason that there are a high amount of collisions involving motorcycles.

Any failure to clearly spot a motorcycle (without Hi-Vis) at 20 meters in good conditions cannot be blamed upon a rider who is following the course of the road, but rather on the disturbing lack of observation prevalent in Irish drivers.

The old saying of "Oh but I didn't see you," from drivers just isn't good enough.

I see this every day myself, drivers glancing left and right at a stop sign, before proceeding having not taken the proper observation or even halting at a stop sign. A glance simply isn't enough when you're out on the roads and vehicles are flying up and down the road at high speeds.

We all know why people wear hi-vis, but what if I was to argue that people have become too used to seeing hi-vis? Perhaps people simply don't take notice of hi-visibility clothing anymore? There are a lot of theories out there that would suggest that hi-visibility clothing has just become a natural thing for people to see, that it doesn't stand out anymore.

Criminals have even taken advantage of this, posing as council workers etc, to gain entry to homes. So is this the case on the road? I think it is.

Too often have I had major scares in which another vehicle would switch lanes without indicating or just pulling out on top of me, causing me to swerve and almost lose control.

As I said above, I always practice 'defensive riding,' so I manage to avoid negligent drivers most of the time. Unfortunately, back in October, I was unable to dodge a jeep which knocked me off my motorbike while going through a roundabout. This person simply drove off as I was left sprawled on the tarmac, after smashing my head off the road during the fall. Luckily my helmet did its job though.

'Let the rider decide on hi-vis clothing'



Motorcyclist Cáthal Power, left, doesn't agree with the Road Safety Authority when they say that hi-vis clothing will slash the amount of motorcycle collisions on our roads.

know exactly the risks we are taking every time we throw our leg over the saddle and fire up our machines. It shouldn't be down to the motorcyclist, who is abiding the law and practicing safe riding, to alert other road users of their presence.

Why should we make up for the shortfall of other road users? Many bikers use hi-vis when they feel it is appropriate, but we all know that it isn't a silver bullet per-se. I know that by wearing the proper bike gear (good fitting helmet, gloves, boots, leathers/textile motorbike gear), I stand a chance of avoiding serious injuring or worse in the unfortunate event that I should come off my motorbike. I know for a fact, that wearing a pair of shorts, runners, an over-sized helmet and a hi-vis jacket, isn't going to save me from serious injury or worse.

However I believe there is a better way to combat the collision rate involving motorcyclists. The RSA could encourage the use of proper bike gear, sensible driving by bikers, and proper observation from all road users. While they might do this to an extent, I believe that they don't do enough of it.

It's astonishing to see that the new training for car drivers allows the pupil to be out on the road for at least 20 hours before they are told to look out for other road users. This is in stark contrast to the training for motorcyclists where they are grilled on observational skills before being left near a public road.

In conclusion I am not opposed to high visibility clothing per-se, rather I am opposed to the mandatory aspect. I do believe that the RSA are trying to make a difference, a change for the good, but I believe they are going about it the wrong way.

I believe the problem isn't really with motorcyclists, it's generally the lack of observation from other drivers. People often see motorcyclists as dangerous and that the people that ride them are careless and dangerous on the road. Why should bikers be demonised and punished for the shortfalls of other road users?

Let the rider decide.

For the record, I was wearing a Sam Brown hi-visibility belt when this incident happened. People may claim that 'oh if you had a full hi-vis on they would have seen you.' I'm sorry but that's utter nonsense, it was clear that this person simply didn't look and cut right across me before driving away from the scene. There was no excuse for them not to have seen me if they had looked. This happens each day to other motorcyclists. It's truly baffling in my opinion that the RSA believe a piece of yellow clothing will slash the amount of motorcycle collisions on our roads.

I personally don't buy into the attitude of, "Oh but if it saves one life, then won't it be worth it?" argument that those in favour of it would preach. I believe that I, and other motorcyclists,

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