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Trustees:
Prof. Tim Coats, Kris Gledhill,
Deborah Johnson, Dr Will Murray,
Peter Parkin, Mike Williams

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Registered charity No. 1093244



Rt Hon Alan Johnson MP
Home Secretary
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

By email to: public.enquiries@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

4 January 2010

Dear Alan,

Good can come out of the death of Jake Wilson, the five-year-old killed this Christmas while riding a two wheeled mini-motorbike in a public access cattle market site in Carmarthen.

Brake is begging the Government to do now what it should have done years ago and ban these appalling devices that are sold as toys for children but which are such obvious death traps.

The reason I am writing specifically to you is because former Home Secretary John Reid, speaking about mini-motorbikes in 2006, said:

“At best they are a nuisance running through to a menace and at worst are very very dangerous indeed. We are trying to make sure that mums and dads know that.”

The consequence of delegating responsibility to mums and dads to make the decision not to buy these devices, as this tragic case shows, has been a child's death this Christmas, and as the Government knows there have been others, on mini motorbikes, quad bikes, and cross bikes.

Now it's time to take action.

The Government recommends that a child does not have the cognitive powers to cross a road safely on their own without holding the hand of a parent until the age of eight or more depending on their development stage. Children make mistakes because their decision-making skills and their cognitive powers (ranging from reaction times to eyesight) are developing and, very importantly, they are naturally very impulsive. No matter how much a child is educated, they may make a sensible, safe decision one minute, and an unsafe decision the next. It is the job of adults to protect a child from themselves by keeping them in a safe environment that allows them to explore the world around them without risk of death. Allowing them access to motorised vehicles – and worst of all intrinsically unstable two-wheeled motorbikes – at the youngest of ages is nothing other than madness.

It's also worth reflecting that the most recent driver behaviour research by leading academics around the globe argues for young people to only be allowed to drive when they are 18 or older because cognitive skills that control our decision-making

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processes are still developing in someone's late teens and are not totally developed until someone's mid 20's. With this in mind, even the idea, let alone the reality, of allowing young children barely out of their nappies or in school the responsibility of controlling any motorised vehicle – whether four-wheeled or two-wheeled – is, to repeat, insanity.

By the age of five most parents have bought their child a bicycle, and some children can ride without stabilisers. But every parent also knows that even if a five-year-old can confidently ride their bike successfully in a park, but that they will inevitably fall off occasionally and suffer little more than a graze if they are wearing their helmet. Armed with this knowledge that children fall off bicycles, why on earth would any parent want their young child on a motorised motorbike with the weight and speed to inflict such obvious and extreme harm, while offering no health benefit?

It is argued that under 'proper conditions' such as in club environments the risk of riding motorised vehicles can be minimised for children. But children will still be children no matter what environment they are in, and if something does go wrong the consequence can so easily be a child's death due to the speed and weight of these vehicles. While it is true that children have been killed in other activities – ranging from hockey to rugby – it can be reasonably argued, as with cycling, that these true sports are not just fun but bring enormous health benefits that also do not pollute the atmosphere through unnecessary carbon emissions and the cost of constructing vehicles in the first place.

Please –

1. Ban entirely the sale and use of mini motorbikes. They should not be used by children, and correctly licensed adults have access to full size motorbikes, suitable for their larger size.
2. Ban the use of quad bikes and cross bikes by children. They are also motorised vehicles that should not be used by children and have killed.
3. In the same way you need a licence to use a gun, introduce a licensing scheme for quad bikers and cross bikers (including when they are on private ground) to protect them, running the appropriate consultation regarding at what age licensing should be allowed and restrictions on those licensed, such as compulsory safety clothing and helmets. Quad bikes and cross bikes respond differently to other motorised vehicles and yet carry similar dangers.

Yours sincerely,



Mary Williams OBE
Chief executive
Brake, the road safety charity

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