

Noise for boys

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It must have been in 1963 when I, aged 16, was pulled over by two motorcycle agents. Months later, the juvenile court magistrate issued a confiscation order for all non-approved parts of my second-hand little Puch moped. Imagine that in today's world, with all the thousands of illegal exhaust pipes around! The likelihood of being pulled over for a big fat megaphone exhaust is almost non-existent compared to 1963, when neither the public nor politics were losing any sleep over the environment.

Nowadays motorcycles are not primarily a means of transport, but rather a means of **enjoyment**, the ultimate hard drug on two wheels. The fun starts at a minimum of 100 Hp and with an acceleration that leaves Porches in the dust, demanding more self-control than many an engine-power junkie can muster. Recently four motorcyclist deaths occurred in a single weekend, and the Royal Dutch Touring Club (ANWB) sounded the alarm. Whereas 50 Hp was the maximum in my motorbiking days (around 1965), nowadays it's the minimum.

[O011 Image 2](#)

The same applies to cars: ordinary family cars now have more horsepower and better performance than famous rally cars from those days. Motorcycle and car magazines wax lyrical about speed sensations, kicks and adrenaline, typifying the hedonistic spirit of a time in which individual pleasure is top priority.

Enquiring after the negative consequences is taboo – technology will solve everything, right? But hold on... as safety technology increases, risk awareness decreases and driving behaviour becomes more dangerous (see '[Speedaholism](#)'): this phenomenon is known as **risk compensation**. This fact alone dictates that the roads will never be completely risk-free.

'Acoustic erections have become a million-dollar industry'

It may seem as if increasingly strict standards have solved the problem of noise pollution. You never hear a Honda Goldwing anymore. Solved? Far from it! These days the pleasure doesn't count unless you also reach auditory orgasm, either on two wheels or four. Acoustic erections and sound-scintillation are being cultivated and have become a million-dollar industry. *GTO magazine* recently tested the winner of the most tuneful tumult, a 'symphony of cylinders', the Ferrari 575 M Maranello.

Ferrari has succeeded in influencing the European Noise Directives to such an extent that the testing regulations have been formulated in a very noise-friendly manner. Although the decibel norms seem tighter, during the level tests a Ferrari can drive past the microphones almost idling, without the piercing shriek with which Ferrari drivers spread their acoustic pheromones even

counting. In this way, cars and motorbikes are able to increase the level and variety with which they create a racket (a.k.a. 'adjustable sound engineering').

Unfortunately, many men aren't satisfied with a generic, factory-produced erection and either bore out their exhaust pipe themselves or have a megaphone exhaust fitted. You hear them everywhere, pimped-up little GTIs and Subaru Impreza WRXs, still audible even from kilometres away.

And the consequences? Here's one example: friends of mine once lived in a nice farmhouse beside a winding country road, but have since moved back to the centre of Utrecht. When the weather was nice they simply couldn't bear it, hundreds of motorbikes tearing through the quiet zone(!), sometimes ten at a time. Ducatis are the worst, with a sound like a machine gun, whereas Harleys are more reminiscent of B-17s from the Second World War.

'I was ready to throttle him'

[O019 image 1](#)

I once lived next door to one of these joyriders. He didn't have a muffler (but his tattoos were impressive), and when he came home he would wake the whole street. Insulation is ineffective against low frequencies, and even earplugs were no use. After dozens of nights of interrupted sleep I was ready to throttle him, but instead devised a more peaceful solution: **expanding foam!** Just spray it into the exhaust a few seconds, and once it has hardened the motor will choke and an approved muffler can be installed.

It's sad that it has come to this, and that hundreds of thousands of people suffer disturbed sleep or cannot sit outside anymore because of the din created by a few who claim the right to enjoy it. The deliberate noise created by cars, motorbikes and mopeds is a source of stress, health risks and aggression that is greatly underestimated in sustainability policies and publicity.

Traffic noise measurement criteria do not take this kind of excess into consideration, and sound barriers are no obstruction. The police received measurement equipment to the tune of millions from the Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment (VROM), which is evidently going unused.

What surprises me is that politicians, who use every hype as an excuse to launch an enquiry, are simply leaving this problem alone. Even the environmentalists are keeping quiet. Many politicians and police workers are fanatic motorcyclists, which means that sound polluters can count on some leniency. The *pleasure for some* is in fact outweighing the *inconvenience for many*.

Perhaps some ground can be gained on a neighbourhood level, using social control or 'shaming and blaming'. And if that doesn't help, well, there's always the can of expanding foam.