

# The good, ugly sides of Oyo Okada riders

By Ola Ajayi

COMMERCIAL motorcycle is no doubt a faster means of transportation than vehicles especially in areas where gridlock is a common phenomenon. Due to their small sizes, they meander and find their ways where vehicles are stuck. As it is in other cities across the country, they seem to outnumber vehicles in Oyo State especially in Ibadan metropolis. They operate under the auspices of Amalgamated Commercial Motorcycle Owners and Riders Association of Nigeria (ACOMORAN).

Following their alleged atrocities and criminal acts, some state governors and until recently the federal government threatened to ban them from major roads.

As a result of their hasty nature and recklessness, commercial motorcyclists otherwise known as okada riders have sent hundreds of thousands to early graves. Instead of one passenger, they carry three or four and this increases casualty figure when accident happens.

At the University College Hospital, Ibadan and some other hospitals in the city, okada victims are innumerable. While the staff are still battling to save some lives, other fatally injured victims are brought into the Accident and Emergency section of the teaching hospital. A larger percentage of okada accident victims die or in some cases, are maimed for

life.

As fast as it seems, it appears the shortest way to the grave. It has rendered many families in sorrow having lost their loved ones. Okada accidents occur on daily basis in Ibadan and its environs.

Just recently, five persons lost their lives at the popular area 110 in Ibadan. The wreckage of the two ill-fated motor-cycles with registration number OYO KNH 527708, and LAGOS GGE 7550 were left in the middle of the express-way as at the time of filing this report.

According to an eyewitness account, the accident happened at about 9.10pm as a result of over-speeding and dangerous overtaking on the part of the Okada operator coming from Odo-Ona area of the city.

The eye witness said, "He (Okada operator) who was carrying two passengers was on a very high speed and at the same time went out of his way to overtake a vehicle, without considering the other Okada operator coming from the other end of Iyaganku area.

"There was no other way for the other Okada than to ram into the one overtaking. I don't know what manner of persons are some of these commercial Okada operators. They don't have respect for human lives.

"It is a big problem that if not checked will continue to claim the lives of innocent citizens. We have laws in this land that forbids these okada operators from plying trunk A and B roads, that is federal and state roads, but this is a society where everything goes. The government must not fold its hands and continue to allow this senseless carnage on our roads.

"Let the government put machinery in place that will ensure that these laws are enforced to the letter to save lives. People are dying everyday as a result of these irresponsible okada riders", Mr. Kehinde Omotoso, a lawyer who was at the scene of the accident said.

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Also recently, three persons including a lady were crushed to death by an SUV van when the okada rider crossed the road unexpectedly.

Apart from auto-crash, okada is allegedly a tool for robbers in Ibadan metropolis as about 70 per cent of robbery attacks were traceable to okada riders. They snatch bags, money and other valu-

ables.

Their alleged criminal tendencies are not limited to the city. They rob on the outskirts of the city: At Apete area, two okada riders swooped on some bricklayers who were working at a new site. When they were about leaving after the day's work, the okada riders held the bricklayers hostage and collected all the daily wages at gun point.

## Violation of traffic rules

At times, they have the guts of engaging the police when trying to ensure the okada riders don't violate traffic rules and regulation. At Kuola in Apata area of the city, five vehicles and seven motorcycles were torched by the aggrieved okada riders who complained bitterly about alleged high-handedness of the policemen in the area.

According to eyewitness account, the crisis ensued when an okada rider allegedly violated a police directive that banned them from carrying two passengers.

The culprit was promptly arrested and taken to the police station. Dissatisfied by the arrest of their colleague, about 45 okada riders mobilized themselves and stormed the police station demanding the release of their colleague.

When Governor Abiola Ajimobi assumed office, he took some drastic steps to gradually ban okada from plying major roads

in the city.

Speaking at a ceremony held at the Mass Transit Park, Sanyo, Ibadan, the governor said the tricycles would provide a more environmental-friendly means of transportation than the ubiquitous Okada, adding that it would also provide a saner aesthetics for the environment than the jumble of motor-cycles.

The governor, who lamented the high rate of Okada accidents, pointed out that over 80 per cent of accidents on the roads were caused by Okada-driving.

"Thus, while empowering our people with this first phase of 1,000 tricycles, it is our target that this gesture will ultimately permeate the nooks and crannies of the state, thus gradually phasing out Okada-riding from our major highways," he said.

"While gradually phasing out Okada from our major highways, so as to guarantee safety, we also want to partner with our transporters and showcase them as responsible men and women in society who are sufficiently knowledgeable enough to spurn manipulations of politicians and miscreants.

"We want to show to the whole world that transporters are responsible, reasonable citizens in the society who can engage in productive and commendable ventures," the governor stated.

Perhaps, for fear of the political consequences of the ban, Governor Ajimobi took a u-turn saying his administration has no intention of banning the activities of commercial motorcyclists.

Rather than ban the okada riders, the governor said that his government had put necessary machinery in place to train and retrain them with a view to acquiring more knowledge and experience on the job.

According to him, the commer-