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The Need For A Formal Motorcycle
Training Program For Police Agenices With Motorcycle Units

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to justify the need for a good police motorcycle training program with a threefold result. The training program will improve officer safety, improve the effectiveness of the motorcycle unit, and reduce the opportunity for liability. Because of the nature of the duties required of a police motorcycle officer and the type of riding situations they will encounter in their day to day duties, the rider's skills and abilities must be greater than the general riding public.

With the growth of police motorcycle training programs over the last thirty years, it is important to know that there are many departments without a good, formalized police motorcycle training program. Some departments have programs, but they do not include all of the important characteristics of a good formal training program.

The researcher consulted experienced police motorcycle training instructors from across the country. Training manuals and police motorcycle instructor school manuals were reviewed. Articles from police journals and periodicals were accessed through the National Criminal Justice Research Service.

It is recommended that departments utilizing motorcycles have a good, formal training program. The safety of the officers, the efficiency of the unit, and the reduction of liability are key issues that departments have to consider. The research also indicates that departments should include qualified instructors and meaningful curriculum in their programs.

Introduction

Because of the nature of the duties performed by police motorcycle officers, their skills and abilities on their assigned motorcycles must be maintained at high levels. The training program to teach those skills and assist in maintaining them must be based on proven methods and techniques. The purpose of this research paper is to justify the need for a good police motorcycle training program with a threefold result. The training program will improve officer safety, improve effectiveness, and reduce liability. This research paper shows that the lack of training is a significant factor in accident involvement (Hurt 1981). Police motorcycle operations are a hazardous business. Facts illustrate the need for developing and implimenting high quality police rider programs. Such programs require qualified instructors, meaningful curriculum, instructional aids, and proper equipment used in a suitable instructional environment (NWTI 1987). The goals of any police motorcycle training program are **safety** and the reduction of police motorcycle accidents and related injuries. Because of the nature of the duties required of a police motorcycle officer, and the type of riding situations they will encounter in their day to day duties, the rider's skills and abilities must be greater than the general riding public.

The researcher, in the process of developing this paper, utilized police motorcycle training manuals from across the country and police motorcycle instructor manuals from two of the most sophisticated police motorcycle training programs in the country. Articles from police journals and periodicals were

accessed through the National Criminal Justice Research Service. Police motorcycle instructors from across the country were surveyed regarding their programs and training philosophies. The Hurt Study, in particular, was utilized because it is the most in-depth study yet conducted regarding motorcycle accidents. Legal issues dealing with liability were also researched.

The intended outcome of this project is to assist the researcher in justifying the need for training programs and to develop effective presentations to substantiate this position. These programs, if comprehensive and taught by qualified instructors, can improve the effectiveness of police motorcycle units, improve the safety of the motorcycle officers, and reduce the exposure to liability. The cost of the programs outway the loss of an officer, the cost of a lawsuit, and the death or injury of a citizen caused by a lack of ability or training.

Historical and Legal Context

Motorcycles have been utilized in law enforcement for almost 100 years. Until the mid 1960's, there is no evidence of any formalized training for motorcycle officers. In the past, new motorcycle officers were assigned their equipment and sent out on the street with an experienced rider to learn the trade. With the improvement in technology, it became evident to many departments, that training would have to be improved so that officer skills could advance along with the development of new police motorcycle equipment. Most formalized training programs began in the late 1960's and early 1970's. Most of these departments recognized the need for training because motorcycles were becoming faster,

more maneuverable, and departments were developing more uses for the motorcycles (Pine 1985). The training was developed initially for safety reasons. One of the first examples of a comprehensive motorcycle training program was the California Highway Patrol. This agency utilizes motorcycles extensively in its' operations (CHP 1984 Revised). Many departments developed their original training programs from the California program. In the early 1980's, The Traffic Institute at Northwestern University and the Harley Davidson Motor Company joined forces to increase available training to police agencies who wanted to improve their existing programs or to agencies who did not have programs. The training was developed for both the novice as well as the experienced rider (NWTI 1987). Many other sophisticated programs were also developed across the country to provide police agencies with the opportunity to have their officers receive the best training possible. The Institute of Police Traffic Management at the University of North Florida is another excellent example. This program, along with the program at Northwestern University also trains instructors specifically to teach riding to their departments. Most of the training programs are similar in content and curriculum.

Hundreds of departments are reviving their motorcycle units nationwide. They are rediscovering the advantages of the police motorcycle. For example, more than 100 departments initiated motorcycle units in 1990 (Peterson 1991). These agencies also learned that officers with extensive riding experience on the street still have much to learn about riding police motorcycles. The high speeds, hard braking, and emergency maneuvering, require

a complete retraining of otherwise proficient riders (Peterson 1991). All large cities surveyed have formal police motorcycle training. There is still evidence that some departments initiating motorcycle programs are not utilizing formal training for their officers (Campbell 1994).

The legal issues are very basic in nature. One of the largest areas of liability for police departments is inadequate training of police personnel. The majority of these actions fall under the concept of vicarious liability, or more commonly known as the doctrine of respondent superior. The majority of the suits, either section 1983 violations under the United States Code or under the doctrine of vicarious liability in a state action, center on whether or not the governmental entity was negligent in the training of its' employees. Negligence is a term used to describe a type of conduct involving a breach of duty. Negligence may consist of the omission of the performance of a duty, as well as the improper or careless performance of a duty. The broadest doctrine, that shifts the incidence of negligence up the ladder, is the doctrine of respondent superior. The leading case of inadequate training is the case of City of Oklahoma City v. Tuttle 105 S.Ct. (1985) (Kuboviak n.d.). The central issue in Tuttle was "can a single issue of police misconduct be used to establish policy or custom in order to hold a municipality liable under the doctrine of respondent superior for the inadequate training of police personnel?" The bottom line is that the policy of inadequate training may be established by evidence that shows their inadequacies resulted from conscious choice, e.g., proof that the policy makers deliberately chose a

training program which would prove to be inadequate. A conclusion that may be drawn from this case and other similar cases is that if the police department has adequately trained their personnel, then officer misconduct will lie on the shoulders of the officer and not the entire department. If policies of training were found to be inadequate, coupled with poor discipline, the Supreme Court has found both the officer and his department liable (Kuboviak n.d.).

Governments have historically enjoyed immunity from suit because of the shield of sovereign immunity. Prior to the adoption of the Texas Tort Claims Act, Texas municipalities retained absolute immunity when performing governmental functions and could only be held liable in relation to their proprietary functions, e.g. public utilities and amusements owned and operated by the municipalities.

Review of Literature or Practice

The Hurt Study (1981) was conducted by H.H. Hurt and staff at the Traffic Safety Center of the University of Southern California. This study is a landmark piece of motorcycle safety research. Essentially, an in-depth, on-scene investigation was performed on 900 motorcycle accidents in the Los Angeles area. Additionally, Hurt and staff analyzed 3600 motorcycle traffic accident reports in the same geographic area. The final report is a resource document in the motorcycle safety professional's library. Some of the key findings of this study are as follows:

- (1) 5% of the riders involved in motorcycle accidents were trained through a certified motorcycle training course.
- (2) 92% of the riders involved in accidents were self taught.
- (3) The study showed of 886 riders where collision avoidance

was taken, 24% of evasive actions were properly executed, 76% were not. Errors in braking were the most common problems.

(4) Most accidents are caused by human factors, not environmental or vehicles. Weather was not a factor in 98% of motorcycle accidents.

The study findings indicated that the lack of training is a significant factor in accident involvement. It is clear that motorcycle riders benefit greatly from specialized training, and could develop skills, strategies, and attitudes to limit accident involvement and reduce injury severity. Effective motorcycle training should be one of the most effective motorcycle accident countermeasures (Hurt 1981). As a result of this study, most police department motorcycle training programs incorporated more intensive training in emergency braking and collision avoidance skills the critical areas identified by this study.

Departments surveyed by the researcher confirm that the content and curriculum of the majority of these police motorcycle training programs are very similar. The programs include low speed handling (clutch, throttle, and brake coordination), head and eye placement, low speed handling (cone patterns), braking exercises (brake and escape), and evasive maneuvers (countersteering) (NWTI 1987). The goal of all of the programs is improved officer safety, reduction of accidents, the reduction of injury severity in accidents, and improved efficiency. These programs are similar because of the free exchange of ideas between agencies as their training programs developed. This exchange of ideas took place at different training schools, police motorcycle competitions, and training seminars conducted across the country in the last few years. The

majority of police motorcycle training programs began in the mid 1960's and early 1970's. Most of the police motorcycle training programs utilize their own certified instructors to teach their officers. These instructors have been certified at three notable instructor schools. Only one or two programs were identified that did not utilize certified instructors. Twenty seven different police motorcycle units across the country were contacted by the researcher. The information retrieved from these contacts came from the department's chief motorcycle instructor, or a certified instructor within the unit. The following table classifies a portion of the department's training programs included in the research. The chart indicates that programs from across the country are very similar in content and curriculum.

Comparison of Police Motorcycle Training Content Areas

Department	Low Speeds	Braking	Cones	U-Turns	Re-train	Field Train
Dallas	X	X	X	X	X	6 weeks
Tulsa	X	X	X	X	X	6 weeks
CHP	X	X	X	X	X	4 weeks
Phoenix	X	X	X	X	X	4 weeks
Fort Worth	X	X	X	X	X	6 weeks
Houston	X	X	X	X	X	4 weeks
Tucson	X	X	X	X	X	6 weeks
LAPD	X	X	X	X	X	4 weeks
Wichita Falls	X	X	X	X	X	6 weeks
Milwaukee	X	X	X	X	X	4 weeks

As the chart indicates, the similarity in several of the departments' training programs is very evident. A total of twenty seven departments were contacted by the researcher. All of the departments have similar programs. Only a few departments did not have certified police motorcycle instructors. All of the departments indicated in the chart utilize certified instructors to train their motorcycle personnel. Departments that responded, said that accidents and injuries had declined since the initiation of formalized training programs. Department training manuals were reviewed to obtain chart material.

Discussion of Relevant Issues

With the growth of police motorcycle training programs over the last thirty years, it is important to know that there are many departments that still exist without a good, comprehensive police motorcycle training program. Some departments that have programs, do not include all of the important characteristics of a good formal training program (Campbell 1994). As evidence has shown, the lack of training can effect the safety of the officers assigned to motorcycles (Hurt 1981). With the expanded role of the police motorcycle officer, present duties include, traffic enforcement, accident investigation, traffic control, response and strike teams, escort and motorcades, and regular patrol duties in some departments. An example of the how critical a motorcycle officer's ability to perform well is the motorcade assignment. Motorcades sometimes involve the President and Vice President of the United States and visiting heads of state from other countries. Motorcycle officers have a twofold responsibility during this assignment. The officers are

responsible for the safe movement of the motorcade and the security of the dignitary (Uniqueness). These motorcades are a small part of a motorcycle officer's duties. Seemingly trivial mistakes can have major national and international implications as well as severe officer safety ramifications. This assignment is one of the highest profile duties a motorcycle officer will encounter. It is critical to the success of these operations that the officer receive the best training possible. (LAPD 1995). A well trained officer will be more efficient in his/her abilities to perform these important assignments if their training has been thorough and based on proven methods and techniques (NWTI 1987).

As stated before, the goal of any good police motorcycle training program should also be the reduction in accidents and injuries. The research shows that formal police motorcycle training programs do have a direct impact on reducing accidents and injuries by improving the officer's riding skills and abilities far above those of the civilian riding public. An example of the improvement in the area of reduced accidents and injuries is the accident record of the Dallas Police Motorcycle Section. The unit has had only one motorcycle officer killed in an on-duty motorcycle accident since formal training programs began in the 1960's. When compared to regular police fleet accidents, the motorcycle unit's record is superior. The instructors of this unit truly believe that the low number of officers killed, along with a very low number of officers seriously injured, is a testament to how good the formalized training program is. Other police motorcycle training

instructors from across the country agree that good formalized training programs have reduced accidents and injuries to police motorcycle officers. The chief instructor for the Los Angeles Police Motorcycle Unit confirmed that their accident rate compared to miles driven was better than their squad cars. He attributed this safer record to a good formal training program. The Los Angeles Motorcycle Unit has one of the largest fleets in the country. The lower accident rates and the more efficient operations justify the need for formalized training programs for today's police motorcycle units. All good programs must adapt and progress as equipment and technology advance. Each of the major programs across the country constantly research methods and techniques to improve their content and curriculum. Most formal police motorcycle training programs are very similar in content and curriculum. The curriculums include low speed handling, braking exercises, cone weaves, u-turns, and evasive maneuvers. Each of these key exercises is directly related to riding situations that police motorcycle officers will encounter on the street. The ability to perform these maneuvers well improves safety and efficiency in day to day operations. Some of the programs may vary in the length of training. The obvious difference in training was the length of field training after a basic school is completed. The average field training programs are four to six weeks in length. These findings became evident during the survey of twenty seven different agencies. The research indicates that the majority of police motorcycle training instructors today are schooled at two notable instructor schools. The Traffic Institute at Northwestern University, and

the Institute of Police Traffic Management at the University of North Florida. There are other good instructor schools available, but these two schools appear to be utilized by most police motorcycle officers seeking to become instructors. Agencies were found to require varying levels of riding experience. Some agencies required riders to have street experience, while others accepted the novice and experienced rider into their programs.

Motorcycles have advantages and disadvantages. Research indicated several similar points in all the programs researched. Weather was a limiting factor in the use of motorcycles except in a few departments. Seattle, Pittsburgh, Toronto, and the U. S. Park Police utilize their motorcycles in all weather conditions. They adapt by adding cold weather gear, rain gear, and equipment for the motorcycles such as side cars (Yates 1993). Some areas of the country, because of the severity of winter weather, do have a limited riding season. Their officers are assigned to other traffic related duties during these times of severe weather. Driving and road conditions can be more hazardous for motorcycles than for cars, and the reliability of the motorcycles is crucial to officer safety and performance (Uniqueness). Otherwise, motorcycles have many advantages over cars. They are more maneuverable, accelerate quicker, and they can be utilized for more varied assignments than cars.

Economics plays a part in deciding if a department wants to utilize motorcycles. The motorcycles are obviously less expensive than cars. In some cases, motorcycles are half the cost of a fully equipped squad cars (Charlton 1989) (Dallas).

Motorcycles get far better gas mileage than cars, therefore, fuel cost for departments can be reduced. Motorcycles have a high resale value compared to squad cars. This resale value would depend on how long the motorcycle fleet is kept in service (Peterson 1991). Studies have shown that motorcycle fleets have an average life of up to five years.

Conclusions/Recomendations

Because of the nature of the duties performed by police motorcycle officers, it is critical that they maintain a high level of skills when riding and performing their duties. The purpose of this research was to confirm the need for good formalized training programs. Agencies that presently have limited training programs and agencies who are considering motorcycle units in their departments should implement formalized training for their officers. Previous in-depth research indicates that untrained riders are more likely to be involved in motorcycle accidents than trained riders (Hurt 1981).

It is critical that departments utilizing motorcycles have a good training program. The safety of the officers, the efficiency of the motorcycle unit, and the reduction of liability are key issues that departments have to consider. Research indicates that departments with good formalized training programs have a better accident record than their car fleets, and their chance of liability is reduced because of the training and riding skills of their motorcycle officers. The chance of losing an officer to serious injury or death is also reduced by good training.

Even still some departments across the country do not have

adequate programs. Departments that are initiating programs must recognize that a formal training program is critical. Some departments do not utilize qualified instructors, they do not have a curriculums that address all the riding skills necessary for police motorcycle duty, and they do not consider the critical liability issues that may arise because of the lack of training for their motorcycle officers. This research has solidified the argument that good formalized police motorcycle training programs are needed. Good comprehensive training programs and curriculums will benefit departments with established programs and departments who are considering new motorcycle programs. It is important that the decision makers and organizations know what the benefits of a good formalized training program will be. This research indicates the benefits that will arise by adopting a complete and comprehensive formalized police motorcycle training program. There are numerous outstanding program examples to choose from across the country.

This research will hopefully be available to departments across the country to assist them in solidifying the argument for good formalized training programs. The research indicated that even with a good program, instructors and officers assigned to motorcycle duty should be constantly aware and stay up to date with changes in training methods and new technology. The safety of their officers and the public will be improved, and the reduction in liability for their agencies and cities will be achieved. The research will also assist motorcycle instructors and officers, when the need arises, in convincing police agencies, city governments, and decision makers why programs need

funding and support.

This research also improves the ability of the researcher, as a qualified police motorcycle training instructor, to make valid presentations to police agencies and municipalities who are considering initiating motorcycle programs. The goal of these presentations is to convince these entities that good formal training programs are needed for police motorcycle programs. The research also makes relevant the issue that departments with existing programs should make sure their programs include qualified instructors and meaningful curriculum. By following this direction, agencies and municipalities will improve officer safety, improve unit efficiency, and reduce the chances for liability issues from occurring.

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