

**The Bill Blackwood
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Police Motorcycles: The Multi Tool

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ABSTRACT

The police motorcycle is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because as society changes with population growth, the more law enforcement has to adapt to the changing world around it. Law enforcement has had to create different techniques in order to operate and function in a manner to help improve services to the community as well as improve its own needs by diversifying its fleets in order to deal with specialized needs and patrol functions. The purpose of this research is to show the need and importance that a tool such as a police motorcycle can add to a police department as well as to the community as a whole.

The method of inquiry used by this researcher included: Internet sites, journals, magazine articles, a survey distributed to 21 participants, and personal interviews with four motor officers from two separate police departments. The researcher discovered that the police motorcycle has been used as a multi-tool for over 100 years. As a specialized vehicle, it has the abilities to deal with traffic congestion and complaints. The police motorcycles maneuverability and acceleration capacity have made them ideal for use in the areas of traffic enforcement, escort detail, and crowd control. Also discovered was how well the use of the police motorcycle improved public relations and improved community policing as both a proactive and reactive tool.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the years, law enforcement has designed different methods for increasing the effectiveness of police in the community. These methods were put into place in order to improve relationships with the public as well as a way to increase enforcement of traffic complaints, public safety, and response time to calls for service. Many law enforcement agencies used these issues as an opportunity to begin the implementation of the police motorcycle program.

The purpose of this research is to establish the importance of the police motorcycle and its impact on law enforcement and the community as a whole. Interviews with motor officers have shown that they have seen the impact of this program on the public as a tool in community policing. It allowed them to meet and come in close contact with the public, making the interaction more personable than that of patrol vehicles, where the public may only see a face with no personality to go along with it. The police motorcycle is also a very important tool in the enforcement of traffic complaints, being a unit that can easily maneuver through traffic, stage in residential neighborhoods where there are the issues of speeding vehicles, and be utilized as a traffic accident investigative unit.

This researcher was limited on material referencing this research topic. Information on cost has been previously presented (Thomason, 2005); however, it is not the primary attempt of this research to investigate the cost to implement this program but the effectiveness toward law enforcement and the community as a whole.

There will be several methods of inquiry during the research of this topic. The basic research will consist of books, magazines, Internet, and other agencies currently implementing this program on both large and small scales. Other primary sources of information will be derived from surveys completed by current or previous motor officers as well as one on one interviews.

It is anticipated that this research will demonstrate that with the implementation of this program into the community by both small and large departments alike, there will be a noticeable reduction in traffic related problems, such as accident problems and citizen complaints about traffic problems. Along with the decrease of traffic related issues, this research will also demonstrate the improvement of relationships between law enforcement and the community. The police motorcycle reduces the barrier created by traditional patrol vehicles and allows citizens and patrol officers to interact.

It is this researcher's hope that the information obtained and implemented into this research topic will show the importance of this program as an effective tool in law enforcement and as a tool in community policing, bringing the two groups together as a whole. Relationships will be improved between the community and police, while combating ongoing problems that face both, making the quality of life better for all.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Police departments today suffer from the same problems and obstacles of those from years past, traffic congestion, speeding complaints, and public relation issues. There have also been problems with the availability of units for specialized programs such as parade duty, funeral duty, and crowd control. These issues have plagued departments for years. In 1905, many larger police departments started to use the

motorcycle as a way to increase the efficiency of their service to the public (Bucholz, 1999). The use and need for police motorcycles dates back to several different eras in time.

Several police forces around the country reported using motorcycles as patrol vehicles early on. The police department in Evanston, Illinois purchased a belt-driven motorcycle for its first motorcycle police officer in 1908, and the Portland, Oregon police bureau had a police officer that used his personal motorcycle to patrol the city as early as 1909. Chief August Vollmer of the Berkeley, California police department is credited with organizing the first official police motorcycle patrol in the United States in 1911 ("Our History", 2007).

Police departments, in an effort to improve public safety, began to implement this different method of patrol due to the increase of automobile traffic. As a result of this, traffic police departments saw an increase in traffic issues like speeding and reckless vehicles as well as traffic accidents. Most departments had little means to deal with this rise in traffic issues since most departments' still utilized foot, horse, or bicycle patrols (Bucholz, 1999).

Many departments saw that the cost of implementing a motorcycle into their fleet was far less than that of an automobile. The actual cost of police vehicles depends on the accessories that are built in with each vehicle. Cost could vary from \$18,000.00, approximately, for a Ford Police Interceptor, to as much as \$30,000.00 to \$33,000.00 for a Ford Excursion (Traylor, 2002).

Officer Johnny Thomason of the Allen Police Department compiled a list of cost per motorcycle unit in 2005. In this list he was able to show the variation in cost of the

motorcycles most commonly used for motorcycle patrols. The approximate cost of the BMW was between \$17000.00 to \$18.000.00 per motorcycle. The cost of the Harley Davidson police motorcycle was approximately \$14,800.00 and the Honda purchase price was approximately \$12,000.00 (Thomason, 2005).

By no means are the above listed costs expressed with the intention to imply that the police motorcycle could replace the necessity of that of the police sedan or sport utility. It was compiled to show that the savings are enough for most departments to strongly consider such a vehicle for use as a specialized patrol unit, and it can be done at a lesser financial investment than that of the sedans or sport utilities. Along with a lower purchase cost, motorcycles are smaller in size, which allows them to respond to accident scenes more quickly. Larger four-wheeled vehicles tend to be slowed by the traffic congestion that results from those traffic accidents.

The police motorcycle also consumes less fuel than police cars, which saves money for the users and their departments. The overwhelming desire of departments to improve the police image in the community can also be effected by the adoption of such a specialized program such as a police motorcycle division. With the motorcycles specialized abilities in performing job related functions with increasing proficiency, the motorcycle can also be utilized in community related functions such as fairs, open houses, National Night Outs, and so on. The motorcycle can be parked in a number of locations with ease and can allow officers to better interact with the public. Motorcycles are often used during parades, fairs, and other community events. Overall, the motorcycle can communicate a positive image of the police department and its personnel (Higginbotham, 2003).

Community policing is a form of policing that has become commonplace among law enforcement agencies all over the country. Community policing differs from typical law enforcement responses to crime in that it is a proactive plan as opposed to a reactive effort. When a problem surfaces in the community, not only is the obvious situation addressed, but more importantly, the underlying causes of the problem are sought and remedied. Motorcycle divisions, if set into place, are a reactive tool to ongoing problems as well as a proactive tool by their continuous presence in the community.

METHODOLOGY

The research question to be examined considers whether or not the police motorcycle is a practical investment for police agencies, whether it is an effective tool in dealing with traffic issues, and if the police motorcycles presence would have a positive impact on community relations. The researcher hypothesizes that there are great benefits to the addition of a specialized patrol vehicle, such as a police motorcycle, to police fleets of departments small and large. The method of inquiry will include: Internet sites, journals, magazine articles, a survey distributed to 21 participants, and interviews with four motor officers from two local area police departments.

The instrument that will be used to measure the researcher's findings regarding the subject of police motorcycles as a multi-tool will include a survey. The size of the survey will consist of six questions, distributed to 21 participants from police agencies all over Texas. All 21 agencies responded to this survey instrument. This researcher will analyze the information obtained from the survey. Each question and answer of this survey has been entered into to this research paper.

FINDINGS

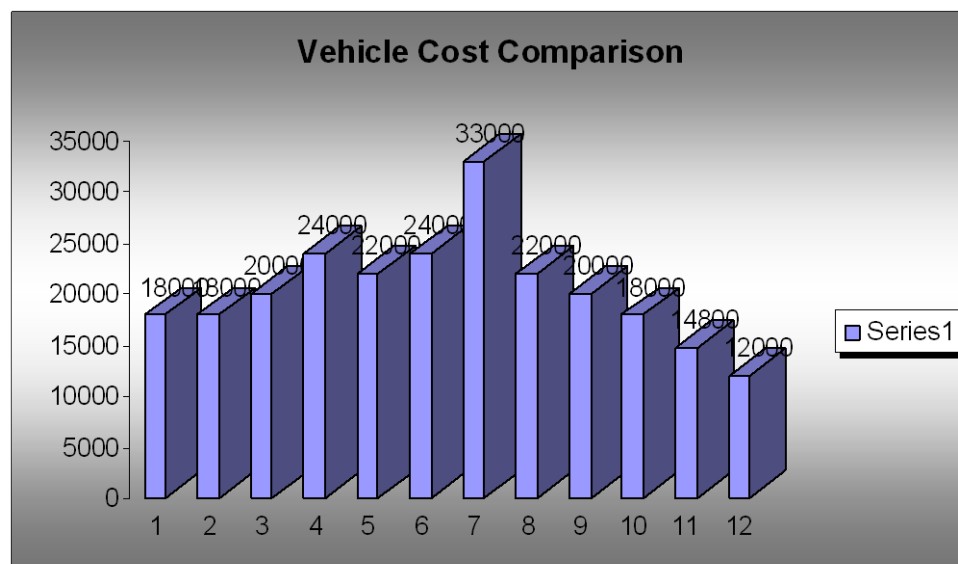
In gathering information for the research of this topic, this researcher surveyed 21 independent agencies as to their department's use or non-use of a motorcycle division. Questions were based on various aspects of the importance and or need of the police motorcycle. Also questioned was the motorcycle's impact on the community and law enforcement as a whole.

Out of the 21 agencies, 12 indicated that they currently implement a motorcycle division within their departments. The remaining departments that currently report to not have a motorcycle division were asked if they feel that the implementation of such a program could have a positive impact on current traffic issues in their communities. Eight of the nine agencies reported that they did feel that a specialized division such as this would have a positive impact.

The 12 agencies that indicated currently having a motorcycle division all agreed that this program does have a positive impact on traffic problem areas as well as citizen complaints on traffic problems. These same 12 agencies were questioned as to the impact the motorcycle division has had on public relations, and all 12 agencies indicated that the motorcycle division has become a positive tool in improving public relations between the police and the communities they serve. Nine agencies out of the 21 indicated that they currently did not implement the use of motorcycles in their current fleets. Upon being questioned as to whether they felt that a program such as this would have a positive effect on public relations, all but one indicated that they felt this would be a positive tool that could improve public relations. While conducting this survey, it was imperative to ask the agencies currently utilizing motorcycle divisions if those

divisions or units participate in community related functions such as National Night Out, fairs, or any other specialized programs or events, and all 12 of the agencies indicated that they do participate in these events. The finding of this particular final survey question indicated the importance and practicality that a motorcycle division brings to any agency that wishes to improve on community relations as well as their effectiveness in participating in specialized events.

Information of the use of police motorcycles by agencies all over the country and world could be found using Internet sites. Over and over again, the same pattern was discovered and expressed by these departments. In excess of over a dozen agencies noted that the implementation of the police motorcycle created a reduction in traffic related complaints and problem areas as well as improved response time to traffic accidents. These agencies also noted improvement in the agency's ability to participate in community related functions.



Sedan

1. Ford Police Interceptor
2. Chevrolet Impala
3. Chevrolet Camaro
4. Dodge Intrepid
5. Dodge Charger

SUV

6. Ford Expedition.
7. Ford Excursion.
8. Chevrolet Tahoe.
9. Dodge Durango

Motorcycle

10. BMW
11. Harley Davidson
12. Honda

Figure 1. A visual of cost comparison for the sedan and SUV as well as the police motorcycle. Numbers one through twelve correspond to the make of vehicle in the numerical list beneath the graph. Numbers zero to 35,000 indicate the average cost per unit of the numbered vehicle.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

It was hypothesized that the police motorcycle is an optimal multi-tool for most departments. The duty of a motor officer allows one to be a productive part of the department as well as a respected icon in the community. The police motorcyclist becomes very well known by being in the community on a daily basis, out where they are easily seen and approached by the citizens they serve.

As shown in this research paper, it is documented that this special career started early in the 1900s. It has been shown that as times changed along with

technology, the need for a specialized program such as this was imperative. Vehicle speeds increased as well as congestion in big and small cities alike. The best way seen, even in these early years, was the motorcycle. It was the answer to foot, bicycle, and horse patrol, making the motorcycle police officer better equipped to handle the changing times.

Departments showed the need for police motorcycles, and one advantage that stood out, along with the practicality, was the cost savings in the purchase of such a vehicle. Even in the early documented days of the use of the motorcycle, there was an obvious difference in the cost of a motorcycle versus the cost of a sedan in police work. In the early 1900s, the cost for a motorcycle was several hundred dollars cheaper than an automobile, making this a more attractive investment in combating the problems that they encountered with the growing use of automobiles by the general public. Even by today's standards, the cost to implement a motorcycle into a fleet is much less than that of a sedan or sport utility. Depending on the route an agency chooses to go, there could be from a couple of thousand dollars to as much as \$15,000 difference in the cost of a sedan or sport utility than that of a motorcycle. Along with the base purchase difference, also to be considered should be the operating cost, which is also much less for the motorcycle. The motorcycle uses less fuel, can be cheaper on maintenance, and can be easily covered under the same fleet insurance as that of the sedans or sport utilities.

This researcher has seen the need for keeping up with the technological changes in society and the issues with congestion concerns along with the purchase and operating cost differences. One of the things that stand out the most through interviews and observation while researching this topic was the overwhelming impact a police

motorcycle can have on any department's standings as it pertains to community relations. The ability a department has to utilize a motorcycle unit in community related functions such as parades, fairs, and other community events is incomparable to any other tool the department may have. The motorcycle can be parked in neighborhoods with ease, allowing the officer to be able to interact with the community and creating a positive image for the police department.

The findings of the research did support the hypothesis. The police motorcycle is a tool that was seen as an important and necessary investment dating back over a hundred years ago and still stands strong today. The cost savings in the implementation of such a program is that of which most departments can justify. The job functions and abilities of a motorcycle cannot be compared to any other police vehicle being used by departments today. Above all, the motorcycle is one of the most effective public relations devices a department has to offer. With all being said, the police motorcycle is a strong all-around multi-tool many departments can invest in.

As with many studies, there were limitations that hindered the research of this topic. This researcher found material was very limited that discussed many of the issues that were being researched. This researcher found that many answers to questions involving this topic had to be answered through interviews with motor officers. They have had first hand experiences at seeing what implementing a motorcycle division can do to traffic issues in a community and how the public as a whole responded in a positive manner to seeing the motorcycle officer in their neighborhoods. The motor officer spoke of citizen's bringing out glasses of tea on a hot summer day as they sat in the citizen's driveway dealing with the complaint of speeders in the neighborhoods. He

also spoke of how children wanted to walk up and see the motorcycle and talk to the policeman on it.

So, with all that has been presented in this paper on the study of the police motorcycle and its relevance to contemporary law enforcement, it can be acknowledged that when properly utilized, it can be a useful, specialized patrol vehicle. It is a tool that can combat speeding and traffic issues all over the community. Also, it can be used as a public relations tool like no other, making it so that not only do police departments benefit from its usefulness but also the community it serves.

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APPENDIX

The questions were as follows:

1. Does your department currently have a motorcycle division/unit?
Yes_____ No_____
2. If No, do you feel the implementation of such a program could have a positive impact on traffic issues in the community?
Yes_____ No _____
3. If Yes to question 1. Does your motorcycle unit have an impact on traffic problems and or citizen complaints on traffic problems?
Yes_____ No_____
4. If Yes to question 1. Has your motorcycle division become an effective public relations device?
Yes_____ No_____
5. If No to question 1. In your opinion can you see where the implementation of a program such as this could have a positive effect on public relations?
Yes_____ No_____
6. If your department currently has a motorcycle division/unit implemented, does that division/unit participate in community related functions such a national night out, fairs, or any other specialized programs? Yes_____No_____