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Escort Procedures

By Sgt. Rob Grimsley

Escorts have been a part of police motorcycle duty for many years. I grew up in Northern Virginia and seeing police motorcycle escort of dignitaries was an everyday occurrence to me. As a young child seeing these powerful gleaming motorcycles with the lights flashing and the motor officer setting a top this machine, boots shining and the sunglasses automatically demanded respect. The traffic around Washington, DC and the northern Virginia area would part like the Red Sea when a police motorcade was coming.

The police motorcycle is without a doubt the most maneuverable police vehicle in your fleet. This is one of the biggest reasons why escorts are a huge part of our daily duties. We can get out in front and move heavy traffic to clear the way for the escort that will be coming (you can never leave too early to get out and secure a traffic control point). Unlike an officer in a car, when traffic is grid locked, cars don't have any place to go. We can split traffic and solve that problem.

Escorts are also one of the most dangerous duties that we perform. If you have had any time on a motor, I'm sure you will agree with me. I feel the biggest problem in escorts is a lack of communication. You should treat a small funeral escort like you would a Presidential escort. Obviously you would not put as much preparation into a funeral escort as you would a Presidential, but you should communicate the same. What I mean by this is every motor officer should be briefed on the route of the escort, the type of escort procedure you will be using, and what radio frequency you will be working on. You should get together with the Funeral Director and make sure that their staff understands what route you will be utilizing and at what speed you want the procession to travel. Once you arrive at your ending destination, all motor officers involved in the escort should immediately meet somewhere and have a quick debrief. This should only take a few minutes to cover what went right or wrong, and see if anybody has anything to add. This briefing will help make your escorts safer. If someone has something that they would like to discuss, now is the time to do it. If you wait until later on, they may forget to bring it up, or it may not have the same impact that it would have had meeting immediately.

When you are dealing with other jurisdiction (OJ) motors, the communication becomes even more important. Types of escort procedures, radio communications, knowing the area and rider skill level all comes into play. When you know you are having other jurisdiction motors assist with an escort, it would be beneficial and much safer if you get together a day or two before the escort to discuss the above topics. If you don't have that luxury, at least have them get together an hour or two prior to the start of the escort to discuss the game plan. You want to make sure that all officers that will be assisting in the escort are on the same sheet of music. When you have other jurisdiction motors getting together for an escort, usually for a fallen officer's funeral or a VIP escort through multiple jurisdictions, there are ways to make this work without stepping on someone's toes. Let's face it, most motor officers have big egos and are very proud of what we do. We want to shine and look good for our agencies and ourselves. But most importantly, we cannot forget the mission that must be accomplished. An easy and simple solution to this is having "Ceremonial Riders". (A ceremonial rider position is in the front of who ever or what ever you are escorting. These motors turn on their lights and stay in this

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position and simply just ride in the escort. They are not a part of the working motors.). When motor officers travel from other areas for a fallen officer's funeral to pay their respect, not to include them I feel is disrespectful. Place them in the ceremonial rider position and have them ride there. It is a task that needs to be performed, and they don't have to worry about catching intersections or traffic control points. If the other jurisdiction motors are not familiar with the type of escort procedure you're performing, it won't matter because they are not considered a working motor. Remember they're riding in the ceremonial position.

As always, training is paramount and escorts are no different. I suggest that at some point during your motor training, you should go over the different types of escort procedures. Even with your most seasoned rider, a good refresher or update will not hurt. If you are fortunate that you have other jurisdiction motors that train with you, this will make your escorts that much safer. Making sure that everyone is on the same sheet of paper will cause you less headaches down the road. This training does not have to be an in-depth training session. Discuss the different types of escort procedures in a classroom setting. Discuss the pros and cons to each. Then go out to a large open parking lot and practice mock escorts in a controlled environment. I suggest starting off actually walking through the escorts, so your riders can see and understand prior to actually getting on their motors. It is easy to stop in the middle of walking through an escort and discuss or answer any questions someone may have. After you are comfortable with this, then practice riding through these mock escorts in a controlled environment. We recently held a one week training seminar where we had all the motor officers in our surrounding area get together and work on different topics of motor officer safety. Escorts were a huge part of this training. It was an excellent opportunity for other jurisdiction motors to work together and get the escort procedures hammered down.

There are three main types of escort procedures:

- 1) The "Reel" or "Shuffle"
- 2) The Leap Frog
- 3) The Bump and Go

The following is quick synopses of the three different types of escort procedures.

The "Reel" or "Shuffle"

This is a standard procedure that allows motor officers to conduct the escort in a safe, organized manner that requires little to no communication between officers. It gives motor officers a standard formation to make escort execution safer for the escorting officer. The "Reel" or "Shuffle" will start when the lead motor (1st motor on the left) goes ahead and secures a traffic control point. As the lead motor leaves the formation, the # 2 motor (which is the right side of the leader) moves over to assume the lead motor spot. The # 2 motor is responsible for maintaining lateral spacing between motors. All the motors behind the # 2 motor position should be directly in the wheel track of the # 2 motor. The motor officer located in the # 3 motor position (directly behind the lead motor) moves diagonally over to occupy the # 2 motor position. This will continue all the way back. Motor officers should keep approximately one and half to two motorcycle lengths between the motorcycle in front of you. The distance should be uniform from front to the rear of the formation. Fairfax County Police Department Motorcycle Squad uses this procedure with great results. When it comes to the "Reel" or "Shuffle", I would

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consider Fairfax County Police Department Motorcycle Squad in Fairfax, Virginia to be the experts on this procedure.

The Leap Frog

This method is where a motor officer will secure a traffic control point. That motor officer will keep this traffic control point secure as all the motors and vehicles in the procession pass through. Once the entire procession has cleared this traffic control point, that motor will then clear the traffic control point and work his/her way back up the rear of the working motors.

The Bump and Go

This procedure is where a motor officer will secure a traffic control point. A second motor officer will then enter the traffic control point and relieve the original motor officer. That original motor officer will then proceed on to the next traffic control point and either secure it or relieve another motor officer. Thus you get the bump and go.

You should be familiar with all three types of escorts. The type of escort, whom you are escorting and the environment will determine what type of escort procedure you will implement. I personally don't think you can say one type of escort is better than the other. Bottom line is if it works for you and everyone in the escort understands the procedure you're doing and you arrive safely, that is what we are striving for. Regardless of what type of escort procedure you're executing, leave a motor or a police car in the rear of the procession to secure the rear so no one is passing the procession. This will give your motors plenty of room to pass and work their way back up to the front. If you are securing the rear with a motor, after the procession passes an intersection or traffic control point, the motor that was holding that traffic control point would relieve the tail or rear motor and he/she would work their way back up to the front of the procession. This way the same motor is not stuck in the rear of the entire procession. This process would change each time a traffic control point was passed.

When a motor is securing a traffic control point, he/she needs to make sure that they are as visible as possible. Make sure you stop your motor in the most advantageous position you can, without interfering with the procession. If you are using the "Bump and Go" method make sure that the motor does not leave the traffic control point until the other motor is in the intersection or traffic control point. That way an angry motorist in a hurry doesn't think the procession is over and jumps the gun right out into the procession or another motor officer coming by. If you are using the "Leap Frog" method, I suggest you come up with some type of hand signal to give to your fellow motor officers as they are proceeding passed you in the intersection, to let them know that that traffic control point is secure for them to proceed through. We hold up our thumb, which tells the other motor officers that this intersection is secure and you may proceed through. If the officer does not see a "thumbs up", then they know they need to slow down, that something is not secure. At nighttime, we call it out on the radio "all secure". You should try to keep radio traffic to a minimum. The "Reel of Shuffle" is good in the sense that it takes very little communication and everyone gets equal work and equal representation. The "Reel" or "Shuffle" is a very efficient escort procedure and works very well. However; the "Reel" or "Shuffle" is an escort procedure that must be practiced and make sure that all officers understand this procedure.

When it comes to a newly assigned motor officer to your squad, let him/her ride in the back and front of who ever you're escorting to observe for several escorts. Let them see

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how it is done, before you have them as a working motor. Make sure they have a working knowledge of how the escort is supposed to work.

When it comes to escorts involving the U.S. Secret Service, I suggest you contact your local field office and invite them out to your training day. Here in South Carolina, the U.S. Secret Service works great with us. The U.S. Secret Service was more than willing to come in and give us a presentation on their perspective of motorcades. They answered a lot of questions that motor officers had over the years. Think about it, if you're not a supervisor you normally don't get invited to the Secret Service briefings. By having the Secret Service come in and conduct motorcade training, all your motor officers will understand what is going on and will be more willing to do what you ask when these VIP escorts come up that involve the U.S. Secret Service.

In conclusion, remember to include escorts in your training and document it. If you don't document your training it didn't happen. Include all the motors in your area in this training so everyone understands and is on the same sheet of music. Communicate, communicate, and communicate. I can't say it enough. Don't out ride your ability and always expect the unexpected. Remember whomever you're escorting, "they need you, you don't need them."

Ride Safe.

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