

A RISKY BUSINESS!

For the civilian motorcycle enthusiast who enjoys riding on a beautiful day the risk of danger is elevated when compared to operating within a car. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's (NHTSA) 2005 statistics, motorcyclists are eight times more likely to be injured in a crash and 34 times more likely to be killed than a car driver per vehicle mile traveled.

In 1908 when the Detroit Police Department put the first Harley-Davidson motorcycle into action law enforcement had no idea that 100 years later that police motorcycle deaths would be number three on the list for in the line of duty deaths behind automobile accidents and shootings. In fact there has been over 1,000 law enforcement officers (LEO) killed on motorcycles.

Webster's dictionary defines the term RISK as *"possibility of loss or injury – someone or something that creates or suggests a hazard"*.

There is no question that being a member of the law enforcement community the level of risk is higher than other professions however there is no need to take unnecessary chances. Failure to properly train and practice the life saving skills that are required to safely operate a police motorcycle is truly taking a chance and one that we need to avoid.

You need to have the right attitude, knowledge and perception of the term risk, know your limitations and beware of your own skill and ability.

Over the past 28 years there have been four studies in the U.S. on motorcycling and the causes of motorcycle crashes. Two studies related to civilian operation and two studies relating to police motorcycle operation.

Study # 1 - The Hurt Report:

In 1979 NHTSA contracted the University of Southern California Traffic Safety Center to learn the reason for the big rise in accidents. USC Professor Harry Hurt worked with a team of investigators who collected data on more than 900 motorcycle accidents, interviewed over 2000 riders and reviewed over 3000 police reports. In January of 1981 the final report was published and it turned out to be the most comprehensive motorcycle safety study of the 20th century.

In January of 2000 Motorcycle Consumer News interviewed Dr. Hurt who advised that there probably will not be another report completed to this magnitude due to cost and potential litigation. However Dr. Hurt advises that even 25 years later we still are observing the same type of crashes and causations.

Dr. Hurt's advice to police motorcycle officers "Use the front brake. Use the front brake. Use the front brake".

Study # 2 - Police Motorcycle Operation

In May of 1984 the Institute of Police Technology and Management (IPTM) conducted a study on the day to day operation of the police motorcycle titled: *RISK FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE USE OF THE MOTORCYCLE AS AN ENFORCEMENT VEHICLE*. In this study a vast number of questions were asked with the goal of learning as much about the police motorcycle officer (PMO) as possible.

Study # 3 - Police Motorcycle Operation

In 1998 I conducted a study with goal of learning new information that could be applied to increase the level of safety to those who ride and serve the community.

Study #4 - Motorcycle Consumer News

In June of 2008 MCS published a report "Crash Survey Results" conducted on civilian motorcycle operation involving more than 820 participants.

Whether you are a motorcycle instructor or a motor officer you should have a copy of each report. Learning needs to be continuous and on-going and when you or your trainer feels that "you know it all" you and everyone around you will fail!

These four studies were completed over a 28 year period by four different researchers to provide valuable information and even though each study/survey inquired on different questions all four did share the same question. What were the causes of the crash?

From 1981 to 2008 all four studies identified the same mistakes during a crash:

- 1) Improper braking – either too much or too little
- 2) Improper curve negotiation – misjudgment of speed
- 3) Inability to counter steer during the arrival of a threat – Panic

How can the same crash mistakes occur with civilian operators when PMO are the trained professionals who must complete a basic operator's course, attend in-service continuous training and should be conducting some type of qualification? If for some reason your agency does not provide this level of training then YOU must find it! You must prepare and plan for your future to ensure that you will arrive home to your family after work.

It is not your Chiefs or Sheriffs responsibility to provide training ultimately it belongs to you.

When I discuss motorcycle training I remind everyone of a basic training triangle. Each side of the triangle is equal with the other side and not one side is more important than the other. Now take that triangle and on Side # 1 write: Accident Avoidance Exercises, Side # 2 write: Cone Patterns and Side # 3: Street Survival.

Side # 1 is not more important than side # 3 and of course # 3 is not anymore important than side # 2. Bottom line is that we must prepare for all three "risks" that are associated with our job.

Each side has a relevant aspect to the daily operation of a PMO.

Side # 1 represents the ability to safely stop or avoid a threat that could cause great bodily harm or worse.

Side # 2 represents the ability to operate within a confined space with control and confidence. (i.e. special event)

Side # 3 represents the ability to avoid debris in the roadway, which path of the lane to operate within and of course safe traffic stops.

For those Motorcycle Instructors who only set up cones on a training day and then tell your team to ride, you are setting them up to fail. Either you need to get motivated and provide dynamic training or get out of the way for someone who will.

In August of 2008 I was fortunate to participate in the 100th Anniversary of Harley-Davidson Police Motorcycles in Milwaukee, WI. A tremendous event sponsored by Harley-Davidson Police Motorcycles with PMO's from across the country. I provided a classroom presentation on "Survival for the Police Motorcycle Officer" focusing on traffic stops and using the motorcycle for cover. But of course having over 50 PMO's present in each one of the courses I wanted to take advantage of their knowledge, share ideas and learn.

During one phase of the course I discuss and provide Police Motorcycle Training with statistics and personal experience, as a rider, trainer and supervisor. More important I ask specific questions to the students relating to training. I was very happy to learn that every agency present provided some type of a basic operators course which ranged anywhere from one to three weeks.

However that is about where it stopped. In each course less than 10% of the participants in attendance had any type of Field Training Program for the new motor officer. And less than 10% again had any type continuous in-service training program established.

Yearly qualifications did occur however they all varied on what type and how these qualifications were accomplished. Not one agency in attendance did any night time qualifications which are something you must consider. Trust me working an obstacle course at night with minimal lighting and activated emergency equipment creates a realistic challenge.

Obviously those who did not provide in-service training are not practicing their skills (i.e. accident avoidance exercises) and those agencies that were providing in-service training avoidance exercises were not being practiced. It's your responsibility and if your agency is not providing the time for you to practice this life saving skill then grab a buddy and go to a safe area and practice.

The following is a list Accident Avoidance exercises that can be applied to the daily operation of a PMO. Each exercise provides a level of training that is required to remain safe and each one has a practical job application.

- 1) 40 MPH Brake and Escape
- 2) 40 MPH 180 Deceleration
- 3) Accelerated U-turns
- 4) Braking in a curve
- 5) 40 MPH Evasive Maneuver
- 6) 30 MPH Cone Weave
- 7) Curve Negotiation

I have listed an example time line for an eight hour in-service training day that could be provided at your agency.

- Warm-up with a breeze-out or follow the leader
- Conduct one of the braking accident avoidance exercises
- Enhance skills on various cone patterns.
- Prior to lunch conduct a partners breeze-out.

- Breeze-out without using the rear brake
- Conduct a no brake accident exercise.
- Enhance skills on various cone patterns without using the rear brake
- Partners ride breeze-out with no brake

Remember the definition of Risk? *"possibility of loss or injury – someone or something that creates or suggests a hazard"*.

For the instructors that are not providing this type of training to members of your unit than you are the "someone that creates or suggests a hazard". For the individual riders who do not practice their skill you are the "someone that creates or suggests a hazard".

Training is only limited by your imagination use it to challenge your students and yourself. The only way that we will become advanced is to master the basics and I have yet to meet anyone who has mastered the basics.

Ride well and ride safe.

BIO: Jim Polan is a 27 year veteran of law enforcement and a Captain with the Broward Sheriff's Office in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.