

ESSENTIAL TRAINING FOR BIKE OFFICERS

By Joe Schilling

As this article is written the United States of America is under “Condition Orange”, dealing with the threats of terrorism and war. State governments are cutting back services to Public Safety, Education and Elder Care programs. Local police agencies are struggling with reduced budgets, and the cops on the street have to do more with less. Sound familiar? Despite what the “big picture” offers, the sphere of influence for the street cop still centers on reducing crime and the fear of crime and increasing the livability of the communities within their jurisdictions.

For more than fifteen years, the implementation of modern bike patrols, have allowed officers an alternative patrol method for providing community-based service to the public. Training for these officers should include traditional firearms, defensive tactics, and patrol procedures, tailored to the unique demands placed upon the bike officer. In addition, bike officers benefit from exposure to crowd management techniques, nutrition, helmet & bike fit, impotency and first aid. This knowledge makes bike officers safer, more efficient and better able to meet the needs of the community. Providing this type of training has been the goal of the Law Enforcement Bicycle Association (LEBA) since 1987. LEBA offers three levels of nationally recognized training for bike officers. In an effort to make this quality of training available to more officers and agencies, LEBA holds Instructor Courses (train the trainer) annually. LEBA now has an international cadre of instructors, allowing for safe, professional bike officer techniques to be implemented and maintained in police agencies around the world. Safe, proven and updated training is essential for officers to maintain the excellence of service expected by the citizens they protect.

The latest LEBA Instructor Course was held in Calgary, Alberta Canada, in August of 2002. Eight master instructors from across Canada and the United States brought their skills and knowledge to the Calgary Police Service Headquarters in order to certify new LEBA instructors from a pool of sixteen candidates. The first presentation was about safety. The safety that is demonstrated by all the instructors during any training exercise, the safety of the candidates, and the importance of safety in future instruction. No one rides a bike without a helmet, at any time, for any reason. This is the first of the rules that are strictly enforced at every LEBA course. After rules come the learning objectives. To achieve instructor certification, candidates need to pass a written exam and practical skills test, deliver an assigned topic presentation and demonstrate acceptable physical fitness and professional conduct. A ride is scheduled for every day of training, and the abundant paths and bikeways in Calgary offered candidates and instructors the opportunity to increase their fitness and riding skills. Daily ride mileage would range from ten to thirty miles allowing ample time to hone group-riding skills, increase confidence and professionalism and interact with the public. Skills training, which includes dismounts, slow speed balance drills and emergency braking techniques, is held in areas open to the public, providing citizens the opportunity to interact with the

candidates and observe their efforts to achieve excellence in training. Much of the success of bike patrols is due to this heavy public contact.

At the end of each day of instruction, the candidates submit written critique/evaluations. This immediate feedback allows the instructor staff to alter or delete presentations, increase or decrease daily ride mileage and address issues prior to any impact on the positive learning environment. In a multi-day, progressive training course such as the LEBA Instructor Course, it is essential to the success of the training to be aware of the perceptions of the students. In this time of short budgets, agencies cannot send officers to training that does not meet the advertised objective. The executive board of LEBA, comprised of bike officers, takes pride in presenting the latest techniques for bike patrol officers and is committed to ensuring the quality of the instruction.

The second day of training starts with basic Instructor Development techniques, emphasizing the role of a training instructor as a leader within their agency and the associated responsibilities. Techniques to deal with learning environments and difficult students and how to write an effective lesson plan are discussed. LEBA encourages candidates to pursue every opportunity in increasing their knowledge base in Adult Education. It is essential that police agencies recognize the need for committed, educated and expert instructors to exemplify the values and goals of the organization.

Coursework on bicycle helmets is next. Detailed instructions as to selection and adjustments are presented, and the candidates demonstrate proper fit. Helmet care, construction, manufacturer and government standards, and functional life span are considered to ensure the safety and comfort of the bike officer.

Presentation of the risks and hazards associated with police work on a bike is the next block of instruction. Included is the proper fit and adjustment of the bike to the individual rider in order to reduce the risk of injury and liability and increase productivity. It is essential for agencies to realize that one bike will not fit every officer in their bike detail and a range of sizes is essential for safe operation. Officers and citizens are placed at risk to injury when riding an improperly set up bicycle. Among the topics discussed is saddle selection and adjustment. A recent study by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health found increased risk of erectile dysfunction among long-distance and long-duration riders. Although the condition is pronounced in men, it can cause numbness and dysfunction in women as well. A properly adjusted saddle, distributes the riders weight to the Ischial Tuberosities, avoiding compression of the cavernosal arteries and innervations in the perineum. Without knowledge like this, agencies may unwittingly subject their officers to unnecessary dangers. Preventing injuries, reducing health plan expenditures and increasing productivity should be considerations in any bike program, and are fundamental in the LEBA curriculum. After a morning in the classroom, some bike riding is in order.

On the bike skills training includes slow speed balance drills. Candidates must negotiate various cone configurations, maintaining balance and control. The instructor mantra of “look where you want to go” is repeated countless times. By keeping a relaxed posture on

the bike with a heads up attitude, and moving the eyes along the path desired, the bike will naturally follow in a balanced attitude. Of course momentum has a part in the equation, and candidates learn where and when to apply what and how much of each. The practical application of this skill is being able to safely negotiate obstacles and pedestrians on patrol, maintaining a professional appearance, scanning the environment for crime and being accessible for the community. It is imperative that officers receive initial training in balancing the bike and are allowed time to improve this all-important skill. LEBA recommends that all skills training be reinforced during re-certification or in-service opportunities. Bike handling skill, like firearms and defensive tactics, is perishable, repetition is the key.

Another important skills area addressed is properly dismounting the bicycle. Whether contacting subjects or suspects, the attention of the officer must be on the complete situation. The bike officer cannot afford to consider the mechanics of every dismount from the bike. The action needs to be one of muscle memory as a result of countless repetitions. Instructor candidates learn how to perform several dismounts approved by LEBA and then are coached through teaching the techniques. The principle of keeping the eyes up to scan the environment and the contact are reinforced in every dismount. Performing safe and professional police work is the primary goal of every technique developed and taught by LEBA and proper dismount technique is essential. It is essential for any bike-training program to include formal dismount techniques.

Another training ride presents opportunities for candidates to learn and then demonstrate how to lead and administer a group ride, ensuring the safety of the riders, minimizing the impact to the community, and presenting a positive role model regarding bike laws and traffic safety.

The next day starts with a fifteen-mile warm-up ride to the firearms facility. After a firearms safety and procedures briefing, candidates are partnered up and begin dry-fire practice, becoming familiar with manipulating their firearm wearing helmets and bike gloves. A padded bike glove may significantly alter the position of the hand on the grip and the point of aim for non-sighted fire. The glove may interfere with reloading and malfunction clearance drills. Bike gloves are considered safety equipment while on patrol and it is crucial that officers select gloves that allow correct manipulation of the firearm as well as being able to search, control and handcuff a suspect, write a notebook entry or citation and utilize every tool at their disposal. In addition to equipment and gun handling issues, the bike officer needs to experience how physical exertion will affect manipulation and accuracy. Every agency should have in place an exertion course of fire for all officers, and a course specific to the needs of their bike patrol. LEBA advocates using an obstacle course in conjunction with a quarter to half-mile all-out sprint to the firing line. In addition, realistic targets to add threat assessment, movement to cover or concealment and planned malfunctions, add validity to this scenario-based training. As with any training, officers are afforded opportunity to repeat an exercise in order to experience a successful conclusion. Agency firearms instructors should be encouraged to think outside the box in designing realistic and challenging exercises for bike patrol officers. Agency policy should allow officers assigned to bike patrol to qualify wearing

the usual bike patrol uniform and equipment. The exposure to firearms at the LEBA Instructor Course is only a half-day, and so is just a familiarization. It is imperative that bike officers be afforded the opportunity to repetitively practice their firearms skills as they relate to bike patrol. "Train how you fight and fight how you train".

Off-road riding provides the mountain bike officer an opportunity to practice numerous skills, repetitively, in a relatively short time and distance. Balance skills, surmounting or avoiding obstacles, group riding, emergency braking and gearing and cadence are just a few techniques that are practiced countless times during an off-road ride. LEBA combines a day of off-road riding with station training in flat tire repair, routine bike tune-up, maintenance and repair and pre-ride inspections.

Day five of the training is devoted to Instructor Candidate lesson plan presentations. The presentations are limited to twenty minutes, requiring the candidates to practice and fine-tune the content to meet the performance objectives. Candidates are also evaluated on the organization of the lesson plan, valid objectives, the use of training aids, their professional appearance and delivery, inclusive language and the validity of the material presented. A panel of raters provides immediate feedback and constructive criticism, emphasizing growth and the acknowledgement of the presenters' frame of reference. Less than successful performance is scheduled for re-presentation the following morning, again, to allow the candidates to experience success.

After dinner is a scheduled night ride. Although darkness can often enhance the effectiveness of police patrol, it also presents unique dangers for the bike officer. Many agencies wear dark uniforms and insist that the bike officers follow suit, decreasing their visibility to motorists and other officers. Agencies avoid expensive lighting equipment due to budget considerations, further placing the officers in danger. Inadequate lighting forces officers to concentrate more on seeing obstacles and where they are going and less on seeing crimes and criminals, jeopardizing their own safety and the safety of citizens and contacts. Injury potential is increased and productivity is reduced, providing less service to the community. This knowledge and experience allows the candidates to aid their agencies in making knowledgeable decisions about equipment selections.

The morning of the sixth day is another group ride. Candidates are in charge of this ride. The route, safety, organization and implementation are the responsibility of the candidates. As they rotate through the job functions associated with the ride their performance is rated and critiqued. The halfway point in the ride is where the candidates demonstrate their mastery of the bike handling and police technical skills they will soon be teaching. After the ride, the candidates have an opportunity to review and study for the final written examination. While the exam is being corrected, candidates provide a final written critique and are encouraged to share their perceptions with the instructors in a group forum or privately.

The closing dinner and presentation of Instructor Certifications and awards marks the beginning for the new instructors. They now share in the knowledge and experience of hundreds of LEBA Instructors worldwide, with thousands of years of police experience

and training. Every LEBA Instructor in any police agency can draw upon this wealth of information. They can add to it by developing new techniques and present them for research and development. The results enrich the LEBA organization and add to the professionalism and excellence of performance apparent to the citizens in the communities they serve.

Every police agency has some plan to reduce crime and the fear of crime and increase the livability of their community. When the use of bikes as an alternative patrol method is part of that plan, it is imperative that safe, professional and proven training be provided to the bike officers. The training provided by the Law Enforcement Bicycle Association is one way to meet that training need. The communities served by bike patrol professionals cannot ask more of their officers than the motto to which LEBA aspires, “never give up, never stop trying”.

The 2003 LEBA Instructor Schools will be held in Clifton, NJ June 9th-14th and in Las Vegas, NV Oct 13th-18th (in conjunction with the Interbike trade show). For information on these schools contact LEBA at (800) 849-7517 or visit LEBA's Website at www.leba.org.

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