



Bike Patrols Doing More with Less

Traffic Divisions shouldn't overlook their two-wheeled brothers and sisters

by Sgt. Shawn D. Maples

El Cerrito (CA) Police Department

If your agency is trying to reduce its carbon footprint and provide a more cost-effective method of service, don't overlook the mountain bike as an effective tool for the traffic division. We have all grown accustomed to the decked-out motor officer on his shiny Harley Davidson motorcycle and the black-and-white patrol car equipped with state-of-the-art speed enforcement equipment, but what is missing from the modern traffic unit is the bicycle officer.

Over the last two years, the El Cerrito Police Department has been conducting directed traffic enforcement operations based on citizen complaints, vehicle collisions and traffic congestion. Bike patrol officers have been able to address numerous traffic-related concerns through citizen contacts, educational opportunities and enforcement efforts. We have found that bike officers are capable of conducting the same level of enforcement as motorcycle and vehicle patrols, but at a greatly reduced cost.

This enforcement includes all of the standard infractions – speeding, red light/stop sign violations, turning violations, and all of the commonly-observed equipment violations. Bike officers have also been utilized to effectively enforce car pool lane violations and conduct commercial enforcement.

The bike officer is well-positioned to observe and respond to violations. This is due to the maneuverability of the bike in congested traffic areas, coupled with the fact that the motoring public is conditioned to be on the lookout for patrol cars and motorcycles in traditional locations. The bike officer can set up in locations that are much closer in proximity to the violations. Furthermore, they are in a position to observe additional violations that are not visible from traditional enforcement platforms.

Needless to say, bike officers are substantially more effective than motor vehicle patrols for the enforcement of pedestrian-related violations and violations committed by other cyclists. With the recent increase of bicycle commuters, there has been an unfortunate increase in the number of bicycle/automobile collisions resulting in injuries. Bike officers are ideally suited to interact with and educate the public about safe cycling habits in an effort to reduce cycling related injuries.

Agencies with existing bike patrol units should seriously consider selecting a bike officer for the traffic division and see for themselves exactly how effectively this tool can address traffic-related concerns. Agencies that currently operate without a bicycle patrol unit should begin the process of implementing a program and discover just how beneficial bike officers can be when utilized to address all forms of criminal activity as well as traffic concerns. All agencies with or considering bicycle patrol must recognize the importance of training, and require all bike officers to attend a course approved by the International Police Mountain Bike Association before they can hit the streets.



IPMBA

The El Cerrito Police Department currently has 30 of its 45 officers trained for bike patrol. In 2008, bicycle patrol officers were on duty for approximately 1,500 hours, covering hundreds of miles. During that time, they issued almost 500 citations and made approximately 55 arrests for a variety of crimes, including robbery, auto theft, burglary, drug offenses and outstanding warrants.

Sgt. Shawn Maples has been an active employee of the El Cerrito Police Department for 22 years and has held various positions within the department, including assignments in Patrol, Detectives and Administration. As a sergeant, he has experience as a Patrol Watch Commander, Detective Sergeant, FTO Sergeant, Driving Instructor, Bicycle Patrol Unit Coordinator and Bicycle Patrol Instructor. He can be reached at shm@ci.el-cerrito.ca.us.

© 2009 IPMBA. This article appeared in the Fall 2009 issue of *IPMBA News*.