



## **Following Your Mental Map: Pre-Planning Your Best Performance**

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The situation was one of your worst nightmares...you know, the kind that will wake you up from a deep sleep. But it was not a dream. This was very real and it gave the officers involved that “pucker factor.” Every bike officer has imagined this type of scenario. If you haven’t, you’d better, because these “mind games” give us our mental maps and prepare us for action. Amazingly, thanks to the officers’ mental preparation, no one was seriously injured in this nightmare scenario. So, sit back and read, but more importantly, wonder. Wonder how you would react, because not everyone would react the same, and the lessons learned could save your life.

### **The Incident**

Imagine this. You are on bike patrol in one of your jurisdiction’s higher crime neighborhoods (not hard to believe so far; after all, that is why you became a bike cop). You and your partner have just left another dynamic bike cop duo and begun to ride down the road. Unbeknownst to either of you, your brothers-in-arms initiate a traffic stop. But this stop is not conducted in the normal fashion. This bike cop duo is on the sidewalk at an intersection when a vehicle approaches with the radio blaring. One officer decides to conduct a traffic stop for violation of the county’s noise ordinance. As he does, he activates his emergency lights and maneuvers between the front of the suspect’s vehicle and the rear of a truck stopped at a stop sign. Approaching from the front, he stops beside the driver’s door and straddles his bike, identifying himself and telling the driver to pull over. As he identifies himself as a police officer, the driver looks at him, steps on the gas, and turns. The driver’s side mirror strikes the officer, knocking him to the ground.

As you continue traveling away from the scene, you hear screams of distress and those oh-so-familiar words, “Stop, Police!” Instinctively, you know it is time to bring your A-game. Your attention is captured, and you begin to turn a corner in an attempt to find the commotion and spring into action. As you do, you see a 2,000 pound automobile barreling down the road, straight at you. You have only a second, maybe less, to react. What would you do?

This very incident happened to a couple of bike officers in my department. It calls to mind several officer safety issues. My intent in revisiting this incident is not to be a “Monday morning quarterback”, but to highlight points that all of us can learn from, even seasoned veterans.

### **The Traffic Stop**

The first point here is the appearance of complacency. Complacency kills! In this case, the first officer was complacent about the traffic stop. Just because he thought he was dealing with a simple noise violation did not mean he could let his guard down. That complacency led to



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flawed decision making – deciding to go between two cars and in front of the target vehicle to conduct the traffic stop.

When we are on bikes, the environment can dictate our tactics. In this case, the officer had the option to get behind the target vehicle to conduct the traffic stop. Had he made this decision, he would have been in a position of advantage from the start.

We should all know that, so let's explore the possibilities and say the officer had no other option but to approach from the front (ruling out the decision to let the vehicle pass and then ride behind it to conduct the traffic stop). When the officer began to identify himself, he should have dismounted his bike and positioned it and himself in the most advantageous manner.

Alternatively, he could have ridden wide of the vehicle and turned around, which would have placed him in a position of advantage and minimized the potential of being hit by the car.

Regardless of your approach, and because you do not always have a choice, you need to put yourself into a position of advantage as quickly as possible.

### **The Emergency Dismount**

The second officer's actions highlight the importance of honing emergency stopping and dismounting techniques. These are arguably the most dangerous aspects of bike patrol training, incorporating a hazardous cocktail of speed, brakes, and gravity. However, mastering these techniques is extremely valuable to every bike officer for overcoming the "what if" factors.

As you imagined yourself in this scenario, you had a split second decision to make: employ maximum braking to a stop, maneuver the bike away from the oncoming vehicle, or bail. In the actual situation, the officer determined that the area was too tight and he would have remained in harm's way had he maximum braked to a stop. The option to maneuver away from the car was also not viable, because the officer had already committed to turning his bicycle to the left and there was not enough time to continue across the road or turn back.

Under the circumstances, the officer opted for an emergency dismount. The officer bailed off the bike from the rear, essentially pushing off from the handle bars and pedals, forcing his body to the rear, which pushed the bike in front of the oncoming car. The vehicle struck the bike and continued down the road, but the officer came away unharmed.

The dismount technique may seem very easy, but in reality it takes a great deal of practice to become adept at such a dynamic motion. If you do not teach and practice this in your bike classes, it is worth incorporating it.

I ran across this dismount technique several years ago when I was teaching our Advanced Bike School. During one of the range exercises, I have each student ride downrange at a good speed as a target appears. The officer must disengage from the bike, get to cover and engage the threat.

One of the students performed this dismount and I was amazed by its effect. Not only does it get you off the bike quickly, it pushes the bike at your threat, disrupting their decision-making process and giving you more time to react. Since then, this technique has been demonstrated and practiced in all our bike classes.



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As officers, we have a lot of tools and tactics at our disposal, potentially even more when we are on the bike. So our decision process has the potential to drag and cause us to react slowly. In this case, the officer definitely brought his A-game and made a quick decision, one that kept him from injury and possibly death.

### **Lessons Learned**

This incident underscores the need to be alert and to constantly think about what you are doing and how to do it better. When you stop thinking about your actions, complacency sets in. All aspects of this job are 100% cognitive, whether you are writing a report or a ticket, riding a bike, or shooting a firearm. You must constantly think about how to perform at your best. When you stop thinking, bad things happen. Had the first officer been thinking quickly and carefully, he would have performed better and might have avoided being hit by the car.

The second officer's actions underscore two issues: mental maps and training. You need to have a mental map of your potential actions. This mental map can only be developed by asking yourself "What if...?" "What if a threat appears in front of me? What if a suspect takes off running? What if a car tries to run me down?" By developing your mental map, you are training your mind to refer more quickly to your preparation. This will, in turn, enable you to react more quickly.

Secondly, you need to maintain a high level of training, and learn to perform difficult maneuvers. The level at which you train has a dramatic impact on your performance. You have probably heard the saying, "Your worst day has to be better than their best day." That is definitely true, but I also like to paraphrase Bennie Cooley, a world champion competition shooter and instructor. "When time for action has come, we will not rise to the occasion, but rather perform to the level at which we train." These words stick with me. Training must be safe, but we must endeavor to push the level of our training ever higher.

Some of you might be wondering what happened to our suspect. The good guys always win, and a bike cop always gets the bad guy. The driver was apprehended a short distance away, right in front of her residence, and charged with a variety of felonies and misdemeanors, including DUI and a violation of the noise ordinance. The reason she fled? She did not want her car to be towed.

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