

Post M.P.s Come Along for the Ride

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Riding in pairs through the housing areas of Ft. Bliss, Texas, military police are silently keeping vigil to protect our persons and property from any criminal element. But these MPs differ from their motorized counterparts: they patrol on 21-speed Cannondale and Trek police mountain bikes.

The advantages of patrolling by bike are many. First, the personal contact between a bicycle mounted MP and the public is far greater than with those MPs that patrol in a police sedan.

“We are constantly being approached by the kids and parents in our neighborhoods. Our guys can talk to as many as 50 people during just one shift,” said Sergeant Gary Moore, the bike patrol section supervisor.

Secondly, the bicycle mounted MP facilitates the true nature of the bike patrol’s mission: Community Oriented Policing.

Community Policing is defined as a policing *philosophy* that promotes and supports organizational strategies to address the causes and reduce the fear of crime and social disorder through problem-solving tactics and community-police partnerships.

In order to give them the skills and tactics necessary to patrol from a mountain bike, the Ft. Bliss Community Oriented Policing Section (COPS) certifies all of their newly assigned patrols through the International Police Mountain Bike Association (IPMBA).

IPMBA is a nationally recognized organization advocating law enforcement by mountain bike. Their basic certification is the *Police Cyclist Course*, based on the *Effective Cycling* program created by John Forester and the League of American Bicyclists. *Effective Cycling* is based on the principles of Vehicular Cycling, and teaches cyclists that they fare best when they act and are treated as drivers of vehicles.

“Center MP Company has the only certified police bike instructor in the region now,” says Captain John Adams, commanding officer of the Ft. Bliss law enforcement sections, including COPS. The military police have opened up training opportunities for all of the surrounding local law enforcement, including the El Paso Police Department, University of Texas El Paso campus police, and the Holloman AFB, New Mexico, Security Police.

Not only a public relations tool, policing by mountain bike is an effective tool for law enforcement. The “Stealth Mode” of patrolling quietly in pairs in the shadows and back alleyways of post can surprise even the most skilled criminal.

“You can see, hear and smell more from a mountain bike,” said Specialist Carlos Gonzalez, a recently trained member of COPS. “Plus, you can’t hear a 21-speed mountain bike coming down the street like you can hear an 8-cylinder Ford Crown Victoria.”

Policing by mountain bike has become more and more popular around the country since the late 1980s. Many installations within CONUS and overseas have adopted community policing and bike patrol programs. IPMBA Police Cyclist Instructors have recently been invited to train 40 Military Police from the Army and Air Force in Heidelberg, Germany, according to Officer Kirby Beck of the Coon Rapids Police Department in Minnesota, and the immediate past President of IPMBA.

While still in its infancy, bike patrol in the military has yet to receive the standards and acceptance afforded to other skills such as criminal and traffic accident investigations and the military working dog program.

“We will do our best to work with the brass and others to push for standardized training in the military,” said Officer Beck.

The IPMBA Police Cyclist Course has become the standard of many law enforcement agencies around the world and is required training in a number of states, including Tennessee, Florida, Wyoming, Georgia and Utah. In several other states it has been accepted as an accredited training program for certification.

The COPS section works hand-in-hand with the Provost Marshal’s Office’s D.A.R.E. and Crime Prevention sections. To contact a member of the section, call (915) 568-4851.

This article appeared in The Monitor, the weekly newsletter for Fort Bliss. It can be found, with additional photos, at www.lavenpublishing.com/filecabinet/insi42601.html.