

### **Three Mile Time Trial**

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Effective January 01, 2001, I became the Bicycle Coordinator for the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office, West Palm Beach, Florida. Prior to that, I assisted my predecessor, Dan Smith, with all bicycle-related training. While the systems we had in place worked well enough, when I took over the bicycle coordinator position, my entire outlook and mindset changed, and I was filled with new ideas for how to change and improve our bike unit.

One of the first and most significant changes I implemented was related to our 40-hour IPMBA Police Cyclist Course. When I assisted Dan with classes, I noticed many of our officers struggling significantly just to pass the class. It was obvious that they did not lead healthy lifestyles, and that after their week of training was over they would go back to their "normal" poor health habits. How they choose to live their lives may seem to be none of my business, but when it affects their ability, as "certified bike officers", to perform at a fitness level above that of other officers, it becomes my business. By not practicing good health habits regularly and staying in good physical condition, they become a liability to the department and a hazard to themselves and other officers. Therefore, I gave high priority to initiating a new candidate screening program that would eliminate physically unprepared applicants by incorporating a reasonable, job-related "Fitness Requirement". The solution was not only simple, it was logical and practical: I decided to use a commonly used bicycle fitness standard – the five kilometer (approximately three mile) time trial. This type of time trial, a race against the clock known to the French as "the race of truth," is used as a fitness standard to make a more accurate determination of maximum heart rate than the "220 minus your age" formula.

Even though I had obtained general time standards for this event, I decided to test the standards against the performance of the typical bike unit applicant. I had ten test subjects, three women and seven men, complete the time trial. No one in the group would be considered to be in exceptional shape. Most of them were average; three had failed the class because of their lack of fitness; and one was overweight (he had had difficulty passing the class, but insisted he would not give up or drop out.) I took their completed times and computed an average for my test subjects. I was very impressed with their efforts, as their average time of 12:15 was only 15 seconds slower than the general standards. We decided that our time standard would be 12:30 for males and 14:30 for females. Some may argue that females in law enforcement are expected to do the same job as males and therefore should not have allowances made for them. However, in a time trial, strength is the most significant advantage. A 200lb person has the ability to generate more power to turn the pedals than a 140lb person; and a man weighing 160lbs typically has the ability to generate more power than a woman of equal weight. It proved to be of little consequence, as the three women beat the male time standard of 12:30. I was ready to put my new "Fitness Requirement" into action.

Since we implemented the time trial requirement, we have completed two classes of twenty students. We found in these first two classes that some students lacked experience in gearing, and their performance suffered, even after a one-hour session on gearing and nomenclature. As a result, we decided to allow officers who do not meet the standard at the beginning of class to attempt again to meet it at the end of the first day, after they have become more comfortable and familiar with the bike. Out of the forty students, 37 of whom were male, only two officers have been retested, and only one has failed to meet the standard. Many have been within the 10 minute range; and five have broken the 10-minute mark. The fastest times to date have been 9:18 and 9:30 (that's really moving!). We have been very pleased with the results we have seen thus far.

The "Fitness Requirement" has brought some unexpected intangible benefits. The attitude of the students has improved with regard to what they are asked to do during the 40-hour course. There are fewer complaints; more diligence is applied; and a greater sense of accomplishment is felt by the officers when they cross that finish line. We have created a natural competition, and strengthened their comradeship. Officers say to me, "I want to take your class and become certified, but I need to get in shape first." Quite a welcome change. The next step is to add the time trial requirement to our eight-hour in-service training. All officers taking the in-service will have to meet the new standard. Anyone not meeting it will be given two months to remediate and retake the time trial.

Of course the implementation process did not go unchallenged. When asked, “what right do you have to make them adhere to this requirement?” I went back to my police academy days and looked up some forgotten case law, Parker vs. Washington, D.C. Summarizing the case law, Parker was wanted on an armed robbery warrant; Officer Hayes had not had physical training for four years. Because of his inability to handle a physical confrontation and a lack of proper training, Officer Hayes had to resort to deadly force. It was ruled that the department should have known that his training was inadequate, and should have addressed the deficiency. The damage settlement for Parker was \$425,046.67.

In conclusion, we believe that we would rather have 100 officers who are serious about their health and their biking than 150 who are not. The “Pareto Principle” has taught us that 20% of the officers will do 80% of the riding, and we believe in supporting the ones who ride and avoiding the expense of those who do not. As a result, we can give the active officers better equipment, have less maintenance and get the same result. This “fitness requirement” may seem hard-core, but I believe it is necessary if the bike units in all of our departments are to flourish and the ability and effectiveness of the Police Cyclist are to increase. In case you can't tell, I am absolutely dedicated to my hobby, my sport, and my job, and I am lucky that they are one and the same.

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