

## **Bike Patrol Proves Effective in Romulus, Michigan**

By Lt. Jim Rafelski

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*(Ed.'s note: Still not convinced of the value of a police bike patrol and the need for bike-specific training for cops on bikes? Read on to discover how Lt. Rafelski applied what he learned in his initial IPMBA training and its immediate effectiveness. Then register today for the premiere training event for public safety cyclists. The knowledge shared during the conference is certain to increase **your** effectiveness, too. This article was originally a letter directed to the IPMBA Instructor who taught the Police Cyclist Course which the officers attended.)*

I admit it. I was a little skeptical of your predictions and the insight you offered regarding the multiple uses and potential of a mountain bike on police patrol. But after just four patrol sessions, I'm convinced. The use of the bike for both crime suppression and citizen contacts far exceeds my expectations. Your predictions were right on target. It is unfortunate that the common administrative perception that bikes are strictly for fun and recreation still exists. It is apparent that bike patrol unit supervisors must be given a complete understanding of bike patrol in order to fully understand its potential.

So far, we have operated our unit in a team approach. About two days per week, the entire unit breaks into two teams consisting of three bike officers and one vehicle officer. Each team targets a known area of criminal operation. Based on our actions and successes to date, we are already investing in the following: two new mountain bikes, three new patrol car bike racks, and new black Coolmax® shirts for more stealth on night patrol.

We have developed quite an incentive plan for the bike officers. Officers who make felony arrests receive colorful/reflective "Killer Bee" stickers for the backs of their bicycle helmets. We continue to award small colorful/reflective stars for falls, to be worn on the side of the helmet. Do not underestimate the desire for these stickers. My unit is very competitive and sports-minded, and our sticker system is modeled after the football helmet award system used by many colleges. We conduct a unit analysis to make sure that each "Killer Bee" is properly earned. Of course, the Chief approves, but officially we refer to these as "Bumble Bee" stickers for political correctness!

The patrol sessions have a dual-faceted approach. We usually start at 6 p.m. with a PR theme, and then spend the first two to three hours in the subdivision — making citizen contacts, answering service calls, and doing residential traffic. This is a great PR tool for both the department and the unit. My biggest challenge is preventing my officers and myself from accepting every dinner/BBQ offer we get! Residential traffic enforcement during this part of the patrol has been highly successful. If we have been getting complaints on a residential street, we station a bike officer equipped with a hand-held laser on that street. The two other bike officers position themselves at the next stop sign past the laser officer. It is routine to have at least 10-15 stops per half hour from this type of enforcement along with the companion offenses of DWLS, warrants, open Intox, etc. It is common to attract quite an audience of supportive residents, who sit on their porches to observe our actions. We use this residential patrol opportunity to make contact with children and pass out materials and gifts with a safety theme. The only drawback is the "posse" of kids who want to assist and follow us.

We usually take a short lunch break at darkness and then move enforcement into the areas that have historically needed crime suppression. The stealth nature of the bikes, coupled with the failure of criminals to perceive someone on a bike as a cop has actually made this as easy as predicted! Here is a brief list of some of our accomplishments to date. I am sure that more will follow!

### **NARCOTICS ARRESTS**

On our first day of patrol, three of us observed a vehicle backed into a park in one of our high narcotics areas. The vehicle was in a position to observe any approaching cars, and was probably on the look-out for police cars. At first we thought the occupants' heads were looking down to "roll a couple." When we pedaled up to the side of the car we observed that they were breaking up and repackaging a couple of ounces of weed. Imagine their surprise when they looked up. I know they didn't see us coming through the field and across the playground and I am not sure they initially knew who we were when they looked up. During one of their interviews the next day, there was a complaint that using cops on bikes was "bulls#\*@".

In that same area the following week, we make our first crack distribution arrest. The dealers have been using bicycles to sell and transport the crack and money. Failure to use a headlight after dark has made our initial contacts easy. Our first arrest started with a contact for that very reason and ended up with an arrest, as crack was located concealed in a folded knit cap that was being worn. This type of enforcement will be ongoing and I anticipate the need to continuously adapt to the changes that I am sure the dealers will make to combat our bike patrol.

We have made several marijuana possession arrests in the hotel district. Patrol of the parking lots provides contacts with hotel guests who go out to their cars to smoke weed, probably to avoid the smell that would linger in a hotel room. These arrests also present us with the opportunity to search hotel rooms. So far no big seizures have resulted from these searches, but I predict one will occur soon.

#### **TRAFFIC ENFORCEMENT**

I have lost track of the number of tickets and verbal warnings that have been issued. The first day of patrol resulted in 12 tickets, six verbal warnings, a DWLS arrest, a warrant arrest, and an improper plate and vehicle impound. You can imagine the nightmare of keeping track of these figures. Let's just say it is like shooting fish in a barrel.

#### **MISCELLANEOUS**

A shooting recently occurred inside of an apartment, just as the officers were walking up to the front door. They called radio for assistance and the perp ran out the front door into their arms. Two bike officers responded to the call from about 1.25 miles away where they were patrolling in another apartment complex. They both were the first back-up officers to arrive at the scene. The patrol car video captured (fuzzy and distant) one of the officers making a nice dismount, throwing the bike, and entering the apartment to assist the supervisor sweep the inside of the apartment and assist the subject who was shot. It was funny to hear the comments/criticisms of tape watchers on the officer's treatment of the expensive police mountain bike...they thought he should have used the kickstand! I quickly set them straight. The officers stated that as they were pedaling to the scene, they were conscious of the images of officers who "had no legs left" observed in your class. They both attributed this awareness to your training. They said they "had legs left" when they arrived, but also admitted that they were "kind of rubbery."

We had our first fleeing and eluding case while on bicycles. This is going to be a felony charge as it occurred in a subdivision. The citizens in the subdivision assisted the officers with information that led to the identification of the suspect. The suspect has since been contacted, interviewed, and has confessed.

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