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Competition in Training - Applications for Police Motorcycle Operations

By Sgt. Andy Norrie

Competition: A test of skill or ability; a contest.

It is fitting that I write this article shortly after the completion of the 2006 Winter Olympics in Torino, Italy, where the countries of the world sent their best to compete. I am reminded and inspired by the Olympic motto "Faster, Higher, Stronger". The Olympic movement captures the spirit of all that is good and genuine in the competitive world.

How is competition relevant to the police motorcycle world?

Competition is woven into the fabric of our lives. As children we competed to make minor league sports teams like baseball or soccer. As we grew older and enter the workforce we competed for jobs and promotions. Remember when you took your police entrance exam and your physical testing? Was this not a type of competition? It is all in how you approach or address these competitive events. Were you happy to just pass, or were you trying to be the best in the class?

Compare this to your life as a police motorcycle officer. Are you a better rider now than when you graduated motor school? Are you afraid to take your annual motorcycle re-qualification because you are unsure of your ability? Do you know an instructor who won't demonstrate an exercise in front of his/her students because they are afraid of making a mistake? Does your Department water down its training standards so that no one will fail? Do you or your Department have an attitude of "*That'll do*" or "*That's good enough*"? Or, conversely are you always challenging yourself to be better, to improve, to take it to the next level, to raise the bar? In management terms: "*A rising standard of quality over time, well beyond what is required by any minimum standard.*" This positive attitude approach to competition is the aspect that I believe can broaden and improve your police motorcycle program.

I believe in life, and more specifically in the law enforcement profession we should continually strive to improve our mental and physical skills and abilities. Many management philosophies advocate minimizing corporate risk through continuous and ongoing training for those areas of our work that are high risk and thereby high liability. Police motorcycle operations are by their very nature a very dangerous occupation and fit these criteria. We should use every tool and tactic at our disposal to make ourselves more proficient at police motorcycle riding. I believe introducing competition into your training environment is one way to achieve this.

Introducing competition into your training program will lead to increased ability among the majority of those that participate in it. This improved aptitude can be directly correlated to improved ability in real-life situations, such as being faced with an emergency riding incident while operating your police motorcycle. The human body will not be able to distinguish between the hormones that are released during a competitive event from those that are released during an emergency riding incident. If you have the skills, confidence and the desire of those who compete on a regular basis, you have a better chance of succeeding against adversity.

Police motorcycle competitions have been around for over twenty-five years. Participating in these events will help you achieve higher levels of motorcycle riding proficiency, mental clarity and calmness under pressure. Police motorcycle competitions recreate many of the stress responses that are found in high tension or anxiety occurrences like collision avoidance or emergency braking situations on a motorcycle. Learning to deal with the stress of competition and focus on the task and mind-set associated with improved performance will help you if, or more likely when you are involved in one of these real life situations.

Here are some of the benefits of participating in properly structured police motorcycle competitions:

Developing a Winning Attitude

When you train for, and participate in competitions on a regular basis you are training yourself to be the best you can be and to perform within the highest percentile of your abilities. Preparing yourself to face adversity will help you develop a winning attitude. This positive attitude will provide benefits in all aspects of your life, but especially in police motorcycle operations. You must develop the strength of character to risk failure while striving to do your very best. Be confident not cocky!

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Mental Strength

When you train for, and compete in police motorcycle events you will develop a strong sense of your aptitude and your abilities. You will be able to honestly evaluate your own performance without making excuses for underachieving. Instead, you will be able to critique yourself and develop solutions and strategies to overcome these deficiencies in the future. Honest feedback will yield true skill!

Superior Motorcycle Riding Ability

It is a fact that skilled competitive riders operate at a far higher level of proficiency than their non-competing peers when it comes to riding under pressure. If a rider's ability is only mediocre or average in basic police motorcycle operation, it can be deduced that his/her capabilities will diminish if placed under stress or pressure. Is this the person you want riding beside you? Is this the riding partner you are going to put your trust in? Is this the motor officer you want to have your life in the hands of during a high-speed escort duty? Or would you rather have a confident, competent rider who knows his or her abilities and is able to work within them and has the added benefit of having been exposed to the pressure of competition. I know which rider I would pick!

Situational Awareness, Multi-Tasking and Task-Focusing

Police motorcycle riding requires multi-tasking to be done proficiently. Riding properly and defensively with the added tasks associated with law enforcement make police motorcycling very demanding. If you are doing it right, you will find it mentally and physically tiring. Police motorcycle competitions represent an excellent way to increase your mental processing speed and your ability to task-focus under high stress conditions. The day to day requirements of riding a police motorcycle will seem like "a walk in the park" after you have trained and competed in a police motorcycle competition.

Safer Motorcycle Riding Performance

If you were fortunate enough to receive good basic police motorcycle training to form the foundation of your skill-set and you are continually practicing proper riding techniques and methods you will have a strong basis to prepare yourself for police motorcycle competitions. You will need to build on these fundamentals to perform well at police motorcycle competitions. Good riding habits and practices will become second nature to you. It will follow you on and off the competitive field. You will know your limits and the limits of your police motorcycle when placed in an emergency riding situation. Competitive riding ingrains a keen awareness of motorcycle control.

Dealing with Stress

One of the biggest benefits of participating in police motorcycle competitions is learning to deal with stress. Stress is a state induced by bodily or mental tension. The introduction of stress into the motorcycle realm during an emergency riding incident could have serious, even deadly consequences. As said earlier, the human body will not be able to distinguish between the hormones that are released during a competitive event from those that are released during an emergency riding incident. The competitive rider is used to dealing with stress and knows how to channel it while the non-competing rider is not.

Motorcycle riding is physically and mentally demanding. Doing it in competition multiplies these demands ten fold and adds the dimension of emotional control as well. I've seen it so many times I've lost count. A rider rips through a competition course in practice. Then on competition day, he/she looks like a first-time rider, struggling to complete basic riding techniques and hitting every pylon in sight. Stress and how it manifests itself in each of us is a peculiar thing. It is, however, something we can prepare and train to deal with. With proper coaching and regular practice, competition can help you harness and control your stress and let you use it to your advantage.

Exposure to New Techniques, Equipment and Methodologies

Police motorcycle competitions are an excellent venue to observe and evaluate successful riding techniques, new ways of doing things and new equipment. Some of the best techniques and equipment being used in police motorcycle operations have evolved out of the police motorcycle competition realm. The competition venue is where new ideas are presented, demonstrated, debated and either proven or negated. To use an Olympic comparison would be the first exposure to the "Fosbury Flop" style of high jumping. It had to be tried and tested in competition before athletes would give up the forward facing scissor style of jumping. Now it is the norm and the standard. But I can guarantee you that competitors are working to improve and refine it or to find a better way.

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There is no one more in tune with the operation of a police motorcycle than the competitive rider. The nature of competition means the bar is being continually raised higher and higher. This push for excellence cultivates an environment for improving abilities, ideas and equipment.

Conclusion

Participating in police motorcycle competitions is not the panacea for all that is wrong with a police motorcycle program. But, combined with proper and regular training it can be a building block in the foundation of your police motorcycle program. Competition is just one component of a good well-rounded police motorcycle program. It cannot replace good realistic and applicable training but it can enhance it and potentially give your rider's an edge by giving them the mental, physical and emotional skills to help them achieve our ultimate goal of "coming home at the end of the day".

Appendices and Acknowledgements

A listing of police motorcycle competitions presented throughout North America [can be found on the Motorcops.com web site](#).

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