



Weapon Retention

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Most mountain bike officers have heightened levels of awareness due to the sensory input (sight, sound, smell) which is not often experienced while secluded in a patrol car. Although this creates quite a stealth advantage, it also puts police cyclists in the mix much sooner than by patrolling via motor vehicle. Because of this, police cyclists can sometimes be vulnerable in this same environment that they dominate. In a recent, nation-wide survey conducted by Officer Kathleen Vonk and the International Police Mountain Bike Association, there have been a number of incidents where officers, while patrolling, have had equipment removed from their person. Imagine the standard riding position. This position leaves most weapons on the gunbelt exposed, and the officer's hands occupied on the handle bars.

Officer Gary McLaughlin (Sacramento PD, CA) has designed and implemented an exercise that illustrates just how vulnerable the mountain bike officer is. During these types of exercises, officers should consider wearing additional safety gear - ie partial Redman gear, elbow and knee pads, baseball style catcher's shin guards, etc. Sharp edges on the mountain bike can present a hazard. In addition, all handguns are made safe and are triple checked prior to the beginning of this exercise.

One by one the officers, at a slow, parade or pub crawl speed, ride through a channel of people which is referred to as "the gauntlet." Without intentional pushing, striking, or pulling the officer, members of the gauntlet proceed to remove items from the officer's gunbelt and bicycle as the officers offers no resistance.

General, level-1 holsters are defeated easily. Most baton holders have no retention device and open ended holders leave the handle completely exposed, especially when worn directly behind the handgun. After a number of officers have passed through the gauntlet, a brief discussion takes place as some officers evaluate their equipment positioning and holster selection. The option of positioning all weapons closer to the front of the torso is considered. Monadnock manufactures a swivel style holster with a retention device for a collapsible baton. It can be worn forward of the pant seam, and re-positioned at a 45 degree angle for better retention and quick deployment.

Next, various weapon retention techniques are reviewed and discussed. Most officers agree that while riding or straddling the bike they would respond to a weapon take-away attempt in the same fashion as if the bike were non-existent. Most techniques include first trapping the adversary's hand, and, or pushing the weapon aggressively into the holster while maintaining the security snap, or by pulling upwards on the bottom of the holster, thus forcing the butt towards the officers' torso.

That fact that most officers are right handed leaves them with only their front brake for slowing and/or stopping. This may or may not be an issue for exiting the bike depending on the officer's momentum and skill level.

After a sight inspection is performed, we present the gauntlet again. This time only one selected member attempts a handgun or baton take away, or simply pushes or pulls the officer. All others are instructed to step away. Cyclists are instructed to exit the bike as soon as possible while maintaining their retention technique and move away from the bike, if possible. Although all are instructed to perform at approximately 50 percent, safety officers remain close at all times.

Partner drills can provide many repetitions as one officer straddles the bike and his/her partner attempts a take away. (Inert O.C. can be introduced in the drill as well.)

If gymnastic-style mats are available, they are ideal to use for those officers who have been properly trained in falling techniques. Six to eight baton/defensive tactics bags can also be utilized by placing a row flat on the ground and stacking the second row half on the flat mat and half on the ground creating a bi-level cushion area. Officers are taught to stay with the bike allowing the handle bars and bar ends to receive the brunt of the impact when making contact with the ground. This technique has certain, realistic applications.

The drill can be enhanced by adding weapon retention from the ground up. Here, the bike is completely removed from the equation. Officers are required to begin from the "guard position," a.k.a. flat on their backs. Officers are required to either fight to their feet, maintain a "safe position," or apply a submission hold, if they are properly trained to do so. In any event, they must focus on maintaining their weapon. Officers are encouraged to perform the drill at approximately 75%. As in any realistic weapon retention drill, officers learn a great deal about themselves and their anaerobic threshold.

Some additional notes in closing. Police Cyclists should be constantly aware of their 360 degree surroundings, points of cover, and should train to become very familiar with their equipment. Officers should practice clearing the bike quickly, and be mindful of riding through crowds, especially where alcohol is present. Officers may consider exiting the bike and walking through instead of riding. Lastly, holster selection is paramount. Most nylon-wearing mountain bike officers should not only consider nylon to leather holster capability, but also durability. 