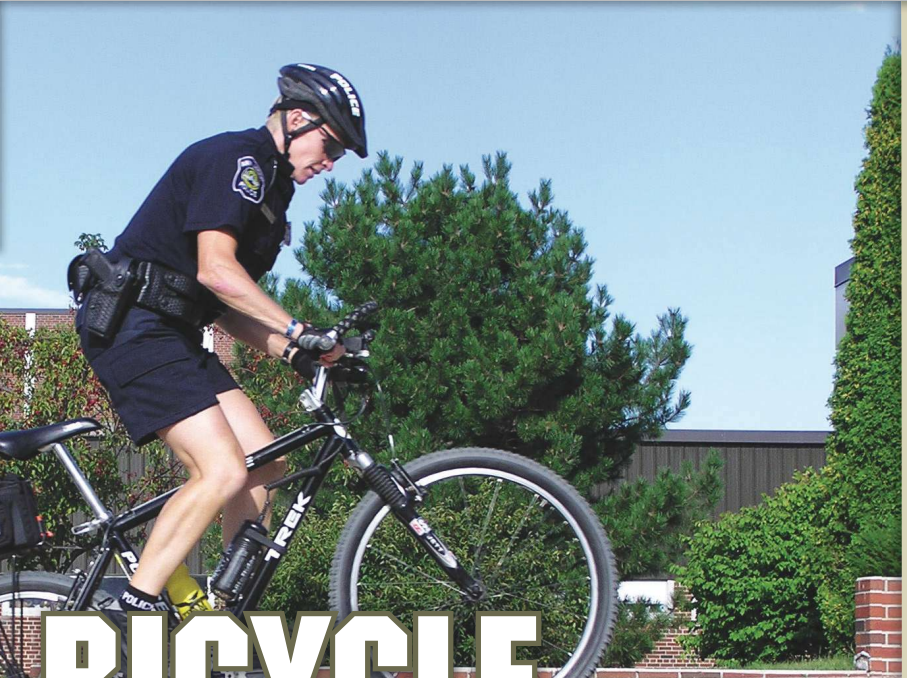


► SUMMARY

From firearms to bike maintenance; from hands-on suspect control to patrolling urban areas; from obstacle courses to Search & Rescue - the new police bicycle instructor course has it all.

► MORE INFORMATION

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POLICE BICYCLE INSTRUCTOR COURSE

By Kathleen Vonk

► The inaugural Public Safety Bicycle Instructor Training Course (PSBITC) was hosted by the Pittsfield Township Department of Public Safety in Ann Arbor, Mich. in June 2011. The course was designed by LouKa Tactical in collaboration with the League of Michigan Bicyclists, and International Police Mountain Bike Association's instructors, Gary McLaughlin and Mike Johnston – 100 years of combined police bicycle patrol instruction experience.

The PSBITC course was designed to teach current bicycle patrol officers how to train their peer officers. The curriculum is true to the LouKa Tactical tradition of having only 50 percent classroom for teaching skills courses. All of the “hands-on” definitely paid off for soon-to-be instructors. The ultimate goal for graduates was to be able to present a detailed, effective, challenging yet safe training course on utilizing a mountain bike while on duty.

Patrolling on a bicycle is much different than commuting to work or attacking a single track trail, so training for these unique issues – in addition to mastering basic bicycle handling skills – is paramount. Each student instructor was provided with a plethora of materials to assist him/her in passing along newly acquired knowledge and skills, including the LouKa PSBITC Instructor Manual, textbooks from IPMBA and the League of American Bicyclists (LAB).

Also included were bicycle safety DVDs from the LAB and Ann Arbor Community Television Network (AACTN), plus informational pamphlets from the League of Michigan Bicyclists (LMB). Each student got thumb drives with all of the necessary documents, presentations and specs to host a class, conduct refresher training, and host bicycle rodeos.



Verbal Skills

The course started out in the classroom with liability issues and risk management, as well as proper program design, cautions of nutrition “counseling,” proper documentation and emergency procedures. Proper supervision techniques and instructional design were also covered in depth, as they are the most common matters involving civil liability in the physical skills training arena. The class learned how to write lesson plans, fill out injury report forms, and keep proper course records among other essential documents for survival in today’s litigious society.

An intensive piece on instructor development and adult learning was presented by Lou Ann Hamblin, including role reversal where the class was required to give the teacher verbal instruction on simple tasks. This is designed to demonstrate the value of proper verbal instruction – not just any, general or vague instruction. Although something may be very clearly stated in an instructor’s mind, it actually appears convoluted or incorrect to students. It was quickly determined that verbal directions coming from the students in the class had to be extremely precise and detailed.

Refresh Perishable Skills

Since cycling is a perishable skill, especially in states with very distinct seasons where all but the hardcore put their bicycles away for the winter, cyclists must then reacquaint themselves with the bicycle, road and trails in the spring. Thus, the importance of refresher and advanced training was covered both in

the classroom and on the bike. The class had the opportunity to ride more advanced obstacles and cone patterns than those found in a basic course.

The possibilities were endless when considering different environmental natural obstacles, concrete urban obstacles, and those that could be made with traffic cones and a few pieces of lumber. By bringing advanced training back to their respective agencies, they took with them the opportunity to greatly improve rider skill level and even add a little fun to the training sessions.

Becoming extremely proficient with basic bike handling skills is necessary when “routine” police incidents have the potential to turn critical. During a foot pursuit, for example, an officer must be able to concentrate only on what the suspect is doing, rather than thinking about how to properly handle the upcoming curb or parking block.

Suspect Control

The need for additional suspect control training specific to bike patrol officers was stressed, as wearing cycling gloves can alter the grip on the pistol, baton, handcuffs and even on a suspect. The riding position poses unique issues while patrolling through crowded events such as carnivals, fairs and athletic events, making the officers’ weapons and other equipment on the belt easily accessible to criminals and intoxicated persons.

This is illustrated and experienced through the use of a “gauntlet drill” in which officers ride through the “chute” of fellow students who strip them of all

possible equipment. In just a short few seconds, officers find themselves baton-less, gun-less, ammo-less, and the point is well-taken.

Expert Advice

LAB Executive Director Rich Moeller spoke to the class, covering common crashes and how to avoid them, different types of cyclists (recreational, commuter, children, etc.), proper lane selection and lane position on urban and rural streets, and motor vehicle code sections pertaining to cyclists. The importance of educating motorists, parents and cyclists of all ages was emphasized as well as encouraging legal riding behavior through various modalities.

Local, state and federal highway engineering with respect to cycling was touched upon to complete the third leg of the “Engineering, Education and Enforcement” stool. Thoroughly and properly investigating crashes involving cyclists was covered, as was the importance of enforcing bicycle traffic law and motorist violations that endanger cyclists.

Also covered: Formulating a plan of action for engaging community involvement to promote positive change with respect to important issues such as enforcing distracted driving and other behavior dangerous to cyclists, bicycle education. Even information on formulating relationships with local traffic engineers to encourage better and more functional bicycle facilities was discussed.

Bicycle Maintenance

Bicycle maintenance and repair included three full hours of hands-on training.



There were five different stations – each set up with a Park Tool maintenance stand, Big Blue Book of Bicycle Repair (Park Tool) textbooks, buckets, cog brushes, grease, lube, chain breakers, cables, degreaser and more.

They went beyond the basics of changing a tire and cleaning the drive train. Among other things, they learned to change pedals, adjust headsets, remove cranks, fix broken and mangled chains, change and lube cables, adjust brakes and derailleurs, and change brake pads. Finally, they had to troubleshoot mechanical issues that were predesigned and written on 3 x 5 cards.

Firearms Training

Firearms training specific to bike cops included an overview of bicycle officer-involved lethal force encounters to date, and lessons learned both good and bad. In addition to the above mentioned, unique equipment issues were covered, such as wearing a nylon gun belt with a different holster retention system than that which may be used while wearing the road patrol uniforms.

The lack of readily available cover

while patrolling on a bicycle, the most obvious in the form of a patrol car, was discussed, and alternative options were identified by those attending the class. Working on the range and shooting live ammunition is important while wearing full bike patrol gear, as the gloves, helmet and pocket placement create new issues that should be identified and corrected prior to working on the street.

Reloading and addressing malfunctions, shooting and moving, dismounting and moving to cover, and unconventional shooting positions such as shooting from the ground after a simulated crash, were all covered in depth. Combining a bicycle skills course with a live fire course can add challenge, competition and fun to any basic school.

Consider this example of a timed course: Quick mount, accelerate to low speed cone pattern; teeter totter; dismount and shoulder carry bicycle over several banana steps placed in a line; remount and accelerate to a pallet/cone combination obstacle; accelerate to firing line; dismount to shoulder shove through instructor holding a strike bag; run to cover; place six rounds on small steel plate target.

Competition Courses

As a group, the class designed their own timed skill competition course. Every student instructor went through the course, not only to validate their work but also to help determine the “Joe Rider” of the class. Prior to the start of the competition, each station was discussed and if issues were identified, they were corrected prior

to initiating the event. Throughout the course, students earned “falling stars” on their helmets each time they hit the pavement or dirt, whether on the advanced level teeter totters, riding a low speed cone pattern with the front brake engaged, while ducking under the limbo, or on the “Poto” (Potawatomi Trail).

All stars were counted up on the last day of class and the “Falling Star Award” was presented, among other awards, as happens in basic classes. This tradition was started in 1994 by Penny Phelps, then the Deputy Chief of the Bay City, Mich. Police and has spread nationwide. The class as a group had to identify a flawed obstacle course (designed by the instructor-trainers) then fix the issues to ensure safety and fairness during a competition.

Participants had several opportunities to practice-teach many subjects both in the classroom and on the bicycle, in both formal and informal settings. They taught helmet and bike fit, pre-flight inspection, group riding protocol, trail riding etiquette and protocol, basic bike handling skills, fitness, nutrition, and many other topics. They had to prove themselves able to figure out what other students were (intentionally) doing incorrectly on the skills courses, then give them precise advice on correcting the errors (keeping in mind the peanut butter and jelly presentation).

Search & Rescue

Using bicycles for search and rescue such as in a large wooded park or forest, mountainous region, in areas inaccessible by motor vehicle for one reason



or another, or even in areas of natural and manmade disasters, have all been proven in the past, and their successes were discussed. The use of bicycles in the days and weeks following 9/11 for example, was paramount to moving emergency medical supplies and food items where needed. The use of bike patrols during civil disobedience has been experienced in many cities across the nation during past DNC and RNC demonstrations.

The entire class met at the infamous Potawatomi Trail in Pinckney, Mich., and completed the entire expert level trail by choice. Some had never ridden a single track prior to that day, and despite the wet weather, mud and mosquitoes, everyone realized the skill development value that off-road riding provides.

The urban patrols took place in the downtown Ann Arbor area, and the class had the opportunity to experience patrolling during thunderstorms and downpours. Patrolling in a downtown area with busy multilane streets, concrete obstacles and wet pavement paint, low-speed alleyways, business districts, and residential neighborhoods all brought with them different experiences and riding techniques. This brought up some discussion on the importance of flexibility in scheduling when teaching a physical skills class in an outdoor setting, and modifying course content for safety purposes.

Student instructors finished the course with an intensive open-ended written exam, final classroom presentations, final skills presentations, and testing

on basic skills and street riding protocol. Looking back, a common favorite among the class was riding the "Poto" and experiencing how honing skills on a single track can transfer to urban patrol cycling skills. Another favorite was patrolling in an urban environment, as they patrolled in both high-visibility mode with all lights flashing riding in the proper lane of traffic, and in "stealth mode" riding silently through downtown alleyways and areas inaccessible to motor vehicles.

Kathleen Vonk is co-owner of LouKa Tactical Training based in Belleville, Mich. She has been a certified police officer in the state of Michigan since 1988, currently with the City of Ann Arbor. Since 1993, she has been a certified police cyclist by the International Police Mountain Bike Association (IPMBA) and by the Law Enforcement Bicycle Association (LEBA). She

is an IPMBA Certified Police Cyclist Instructor, certified League of American Bicyclist (LAB) Instructor (LCI) and certified LEBA Instructor.

In 2004, Vonk wrote the "Model Policy" and "Concepts and Issues" publication for the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) regarding police mountain bike patrol. She has taught at IPMBA's international conference since 1995 to include the Night Ops Firearms and Tactics Course, Survival Tactics and Advanced Riding Skills Course, Advanced Police Cyclist Course, and the Basic Police Cyclist Course. She wrote two chapters from IPMBA's Complete Guide to Public Safety Cycling, entitled "Basic Nutrition" and "Basic Physical Fitness." She can be reached at kathyvonk@aol.com.

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