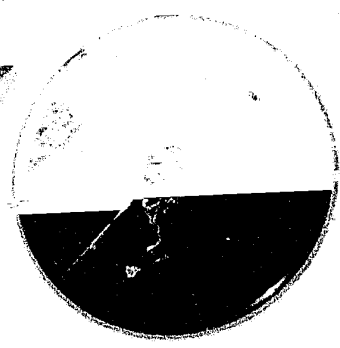
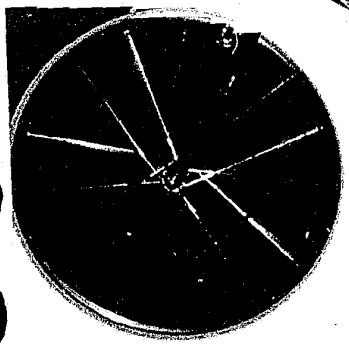




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Bike Patrol

Policing Public Housing Developments

By
SCOTT D. GRABIN

144679



A drug dealer completes a sale of crack cocaine to a youth in a public housing development. Suddenly, a specially trained police officer riding a mountain bike confronts the unsuspecting felon. With no time to react, the youth and the drug dealer soon find themselves facing a wall, while being handcuffed and placed under arrest.

The arresting officer belongs to the Bike Patrol Unit of the New York City Housing Police Department (NYCHPD). The department organized the unit in an effort to address the ever-increasing challenges of providing security and a safe



Captain Grabin is a member of the New York City Housing Police Department in Queens, New York.

**“
Bike patrol officers
promote the
department's
community policing
efforts....
”**

environment for the more than 600,000 public housing residents in the city.

The Concept

The need for a bike patrol developed out of a desire to improve the quality of life for residents in New York City's public housing developments. Faced with a rising level of violent crime, the NYCHPD wanted to enhance the visibility of officers in the community, thereby accentuating the impact of their presence. The bike patrol concept, currently employed by over 400 police departments across the United States, provided the most cost-effective and environmentally sound approach to patrolling the hallways, walkways, and perimeter streets of the 350 public highrise residential developments in the city.

Program Implementation

Realizing the benefits of obtaining as much information as possible on the bike patrol concept, the NYCHPD chief sent two officers to a "Police on Bikes" conference.

There, the officers met with, and learned from, members of police bike patrol units from around the country. After attending this meeting, the officers then visited several departments and saw firsthand how their bike patrols operated. As a result of the conference and onsite visits, the NYCHPD knew what was required to organize an aggressive and effective bike patrol.

After giving the "green light" to the program, department administrators committed personnel and resources to ensure its success. Officers traveled to various sites to receive training, including instruction in bike mechanics. In less than 3 months, NYCHPD officers were patrolling the Housing Authority's highrise buildings on bikes.

Selection of Bike Officers

Nearly 120 applicants vied for 40 available positions after viewing an introductory video on bicycle patrol tactics shown at all command posts. Each applicant underwent a background investigation, which included a review of past disciplinary

actions, civilian complaints, and attendance records.

The 40 officers selected for the newly formed unit then received a three-part medical exam before beginning the 1-month training program. The medical testing guaranteed each officer's ability to meet the strenuous physical requirements of the position.

The first part of the test consisted of a blood pressure reading, an audiogram and visual acuity exam (that included distance and color perception testing), a glucose and protein test, an EKG, and a skin caliper measure of body fat. Next, the officers took a stress test to determine cardiovascular fitness and to detect any heart irregularities. The final phase required officers to undergo a step test and flexibility exam. Weight lifting and 20 minutes on a stationary bicycle concluded the final portion. After successfully completing all phases of the screening and testing, the officers chosen for the patrol began their training.

Training

Bike patrol officers complete a rigorous 1-month training program before being assigned to a neighborhood. The program focuses on safety, physical fitness, and bicycle maintenance.

The safety portion of the training program concentrates on riding techniques and tactics and accident prevention. Instructors teach officers techniques for handling weapons while on bike patrol. Their training also includes vehicle stops, takedowns of suspects, and stair climbs, as well as how to perform interior vertical checks of a

highrise building. And, each day during the next month-long program, all officers must complete a 15-mile endurance ride.

Instructors train bike officers in the various tactics used to catch suspects. These maneuvers enable them to alight from their bicycles in the fastest possible manner and to apprehend suspects quickly.

During their training, officers also learn how to use their bikes as defensive tools. For example, they can use their bikes to ram a suspect who is about to club or stab a victim. Or, officers can throw or roll the bike into a suspect, thereby distracting the person long enough for them to draw a baton or firearm.

Uniforms and Equipment

The unit uses 21-speed, lightweight mountain bikes equipped with all-terrain tires and high- and low-beam headlights for night patrols. The bikes also have extended handlebars for added leverage and rear carrying racks for extra equipment. Each bike costs about \$600 and is painted blue and white to associate it with the NYCHPD.

The bike patrols operate in all but the most extreme weather conditions. Officers patrol in rain, freezing temperatures, scorching heat, and humidity. Therefore, their uniforms must combine comfort and function, while adhering to the department's strict uniform standard.

The warm-weather uniform consists of a light-blue polo shirt and shorts or loose-fitting cycling pants, a helmet, sunglasses, and gloves. In cold weather, officers wear jackets and pants made of material that is waterproof,

Bicycle Maneuvers



Photo © Ken Sawchuk/NY Newsday

The Power Slide

With the power slide, officers direct their bikes to slide to a particular location. When using the power slide, officers approach a subject at a high rate of speed. On reaching the suspect, they plant either their left or right foot on the ground with the knees slightly bent to make the bike lean away from the suspect. The officers then apply the rear brake with enough pressure to lock up the rear tire, causing the bike to spin around. Power slides can be performed to the right or left side depending on which is the officers' stronger side.

The Panic Stop

To stop the bike at any given moment, officers use the panic stop. In this case, they apply the rear brake to lock up the rear tire and move their center of gravity (torso) to the rear of the seat, causing a controllable skid and stop.

The Rolling Dismount

The rolling dismount is a technique used by officers to get off their bicycles quickly. Officers slow the bicycle down to a controllable speed with one foot on the pedal, while engaging the kickstand with the other foot. The rolling dismount is performed in a quick, fluid motion, ending with the bike in the standby/ready position.

lightweight, and highly visible. Fleece-lined gloves and black boots complete the winter uniform. Each officer is equipped with a special nylon web belt and holster, a .38-caliber revolver, an expandable night-stick, handcuffs, mace, a radio, and a whistle.

On Patrol

Whether responding to calls for service in highrise buildings or conducting an interior vertical patrol, officers rarely leave their bikes unattended. The officers must either stand the bikes upright on the rear wheels and take them into an elevator or carry the bicycles on their shoulders up the stairs of the buildings. For quick checks, officers may search a building's lobby while riding the bike.

Under some circumstances, such as when a number of officers respond, one officer stands by the bikes, while the others enter the building. In emergency situations, officers handcuff the bikes together using special locking cuffs so that all officers can respond.

Bike patrol officers often work with plainclothes anticrime units to provide an added dimension to their operations, particularly in drug enforcement. Because of their ability to approach individuals swiftly and silently, bike officers can apprehend both drug buyers and sellers before either has time to flee or destroy the evidence.

Results

During its first 6 months in operation, the NYCHPD bike patrol made arrests for 156 felonies and 211 misdemeanors and recorded 488 assists and apprehensions. They also recovered 2,817 vials of crack/

cocaine, 414 decks of heroin, 65 bags of marijuana, and 30 glassine envelopes of PCP. Furthermore, bike officers recovered 18 firearms and confiscated over \$11,250 relating to drug transactions.

Benefits

Deploying officers on bicycles has several advantages. Bicycles allow officers to approach criminals quickly and silently without drawing attention to themselves. Officers can also reach locations inaccessible to other forms of transportation, thereby reducing the risk of losing a

“Bike officers...increase substantially the perception of security among the residents....”

suspect in a chase. Furthermore, officers on bikes can cover more territory in less time and with less effort than officers patrolling on foot.

Bike officers also experience personal benefits. Many officers have become bicycle enthusiasts and have altered their lifestyles to include more exercise and healthy eating habits. Along with better health, officers experience a deeper commitment to their work and a greater sense of esprit de corps. For many, working has become a more pleasurable experience.

Community Relations

While primarily a crime-fighting force, the bike patrol reaches out to the community by creating a

basis for dialogue and positive interaction between the public and the police. Bike patrol officers promote the department's community policing efforts by being more accessible, and residents and employees of the housing developments admit they feel more secure when they see bike officers on patrol. By being highly visible, mobile, and responsive, the officers naturally create a friendly rapport with the community.

For the youth of public housing developments, bike patrol officers have become new role models. Officers freely give bicycle safety and repair tips to the children, who more readily identify with a police officer on a bicycle than with one in a police car with the windows rolled up. As one official put it, “Just as police on horseback attract children, so do police on mountain bikes.”

Conclusion

The use of uniform bike patrol units to protect highrise residential developments has proven to be an important and effective crime-fighting tool. Bike officers create an aura of police omnipresence and appear to increase substantially the perception of security among the residents of the patrolled areas.

More important, the bike patrol fits in perfectly with the community policing concept, especially by bridging the gap between the police and the youth of the community. The bike patrol brings the community and the police together. One of the founders of this program in New York stated, “Children find it easier to relate to the police, and residents trust the police again as their neighborhoods become safer places to live.” ♦