

An Approach to reducing motorcycle crashes - the Defence Force Model

Major Michael Tyquin, Directorate of OHS –Army, Canberra

The point I want to make by way of these first few slides is that a death or casualty sustained by a soldier, sailor or pilot has much the same outcomes for Defence as a naval, air force or army motorcycling crash.

First, some background to the Defence Motorcycle Safety Awareness Project. In 2006 the Australian Army identified a loss in its personnel capability through its members being killed or injured in motorcycle crashes. Army then scoped a comprehensive study into motorcycle-related incidents in 2006 which found that Defence had a higher rate of fatalities than the Australian population, with Army and RAAF personnel representing those at greatest risk of death.

Consequently we designed a project which concentrates on enhancing rider skills. The initiative was taken up by the Navy and RAAF and has evolved to its current form – a Defence wide project which covers both civilian and uniformed members within the Australian Defence Force (ADF).

Our overall approach to the problem were hampered by a lack of statistical data, compounded by the absence of forensic and other details concerning those serious and fatal crashes that we actually knew of. More fundamentally we did not know how many of our people actually rode a motorbike or scooter, whether for commuting or recreational purposes.

Much of what drove the establishment of a safety response to the problem was therefore based on anecdotal evidence and to a lesser extent on injury reports coming through the Army or single-Service accident reporting systems.

We decided therefore to set up a project which we believed would most effectively target not only our riders and motorists but also civilian motorists living around our major bases. Our intent was to reduce the number of motorcycle-related crashes in the ADF over three years which is the approved life of the project.

What data we did have suggested that between January 1995 and June last year 1,397 motorcycle incidents were reported to Defence, although this figure is probably an under-representation. Death occurred in 3.4% of these incidents, while serious injuries accounted for 45% and minor injuries a further 50%.

Apart from the grief, pain and suffering that were part of these figures there was some alarm at the opportunity cost identified, namely two hospital years, 11 sick-time years and nine years on restricted duty by accident victims. This

not only represented a hefty medical, compensation and insurance bill, but it made real inroads into Australian Defence Force (ADF) capability in terms of deploying its skilled members.

Using this angle we were able to make better representation to Service chiefs to gain their support for a motorcycle-specific project. It was obvious many crash factors were beyond our control to change or manage. These included road and bridge engineering, motorcycle design, road surfaces and signage; and other road users. This left us only with the opportunity to improve the ability of our riders to better handle their bikes as well as to effect behavioural change, especially among our younger riders.

We immediately decided against the 'stick' approach as there was some discussion within the ADF which seriously considered banning all motorbikes and scooters to Defence personnel. The other options were to remain in passive mode and rely on safety marketing or to introduce mandatory safety training for riders.

Our approach was rather to encourage better rider behaviours and increase rider skills across the ADF. A literature search indicated that force-feeding riders, particularly those who had been off their P plates for some time was not effective. We also felt that this would work against our longer term goal to develop riders trained under the project to subsequently mentor younger or more inexperienced riders in their own units or locations.

Working with Defence OHS staff we set out to produce a simple, robust and effective method to market, deliver and record advanced rider training and other awareness activities to our ADF riders. In order to overcome inertia, scepticism and obstruction we solicited the support of both the Defence Minister and the Service chiefs. This was very successful to the extent that the Minister became the patron of the ADF Motorcycle Association..

We then had to work out some way in which commanders and managers could authorise and release their members to attend courses, while at the same time providing guidelines to those who would administer the scheme at the work face, as well as guiding riders through the process to book and attend courses.

In 'Defence speak' the instrument for such enabling instructions is a Defence Instruction. Once this legal document was written, agreed to and promulgated we had to seek approval for a budget to fund the first three years of the project and then to market the concept to the intended audience – the riders themselves.

At the same time we tendered for a two-person project team to manage the program as neither me nor Major Weir had the time to devote to it. After

interviewing a number of candidates from various firms we selected a project manager and an administrative officer. We also went to an Australia-wide tender to all motorcycle rider training institutions throughout the country.

This resulted in five companies being included in our trainer panel. Our intent was for Defence riders to book an off-the-shelf course from the trainer of their choice at a time and location that fitted in with their other duties. This made it easier for companies to tender as there was no requirement for them to invest in developing Defence-specific courses.

We found that they were all keen to meet our requirements and supported the overall safety theme. We did require that trainers provide a project-specific feedback questionnaire to all Defence members attending their courses. These forms are then sent back to the project office for both quality control and analysis.

We then argued a case before the relevant Defence authorities for funding over three years as we felt it would take at least this period before we could quantify the effectiveness or otherwise of the project. We were allocated \$1.9 million which included expenditure on training, the project team, administration, data collection and marketing. This funding and expenditure is scrutinised regularly by a project board.

Marketing was a key part of the project, not only during the launch phase but in the ongoing life of the scheme. To this end a high profile Ministerial launch was held in August last year on a local riding circuit in Canberra. Leading road and dirt bikers from around Australia attended as did many industry journalists, not to mention senior Service officers.

We have contracted a well known motorcycling journalist to provide and coordinate media input on an ongoing basis. His efforts keep the project in front of Defence riders who read these magazines, while advertising it to the wider riding community. For the first six months of the project all three Service newspapers carried full page advertorial on the progress of the project

We also have two websites, one on the internet and the other in the Defence intranet which provide interesting rider news on events, new bikes etc as well as promoting the project and details on enrolling in training courses. The first vehicle for this was the ADF Motorcyclists' Association which had its own website, but we found that many riders were either not members or could not access the intranet, so a second site - whose home page you can see here - was developed in July this year.

Marketing is an important and ongoing feature of the project and a number of posters and other marketing devices have been developed. These include exposure at motorcycle shows, outdoor banners for Defence bases, and

newspaper articles and posters, training DVDs and brochures. We are also producing tailor-made local posters which aim to make motorists who live near major Navy, Army or RAAF bases more rider-aware.

Another aspect of the awareness programme is to offer what we call mechanical seminars over 4-5 hour periods at bases around Australia. These hands-on sessions are delivered at no cost to riders during which they are given practical advice by qualified mechanics on how to keep their bikes or scooters mechanically sound. There is also a qualified rider instructor on hand to provide additional advice, promote our courses and relate machine maintenance to safer riding.

How does the system work from a rider's perspective? As you may be able to see from the slide, the procedure is fairly straight forward.

1. The rider decides the type, time and location of a course best suited to his or her needs.
2. They download and complete a nomination form and take it to their supervisor who signs it.
3. It is then processed by the unit's administrative staff who use the Defence Instruction to ensure all steps are followed. A copy is also faxed to the project officer who makes an entry against the rider's personnel ID number.
4. The rider is issued with an order number and attends the course.
5. The trainer uses this number to invoice the Commonwealth and returns it, together with one of our course feedback forms, to the project office.
6. The rider's details are put into our data base and the rider cannot access another Defence-sponsored course for a further twelve months,

Are we making progress? Since the program began in November last year we have trained just over 1,000 riders. We have also conducted 43 Defence-specific and sent Defence personnel on 119 courses at locations around Australia. As we suspect that there may be as many as 7,500 riders across Defence there is still much to do.

We currently face two major problems. Firstly, how do we measure the effectiveness of the project? Second, are we reducing motorcycle crashes and injuries across the Australian Defence Force? We are still grappling with trying to identify and use the most appropriate measures of effectiveness.

There are also a number of on-going challenges for the project. The first is sustaining momentum, keeping the project in front of riders and maintaining support from commanders. Senior officers and supervisors are being encouraged to translate safer riders into better capability. After all no commander likes to lose expensively trained, highly skilled personnel for any period, particularly if the disability is preventable.

We also need to engage younger riders to participate in training and we still find this problematic. The largest group that has undertaken training under the project are those riders in the 41-50 age bracket, riders under-20 year olds have yet to apply; while the 20 - 30 age group number is low. Finally, for all riders we train we need to ensure that skills and attitudes taught are translated to actual road and riding conditions.

We believe we are making progress, albeit slowly, along a number of fronts. For example in May 2007 the triennial Defence census for the first time specifically asked if members owned a motorcycle or scooter, what type, how many kilometres they rode annually etc. This will now provide us with some accurate statistics against which we can measure the effectiveness or otherwise of the project.

Last month we put our 1,000th trainee through a course so we are making some progress. We hope to use some of the high profile racing circuit riders from around the country to act as mentors and to get the awareness message out to our younger riders. Also our panel of trainers not only support the scheme but often go the bit extra for our riders and this gets around via word-of-mouth, keeping rider interest alive.

The industry media continue to be positive and our senior leaders have so far resisted the temptation to ask for immediate results. However the project must prove itself and it is our expectation that in 2009 we will be able to demonstrate its worth both in lives saved and in cost savings.

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