SUMMARY
Supervisors of bicycle units need to be familiar with three key areas to make timely, effective, and lawful decisions: 1) understanding law and policy, 2) understanding the capabilities of bike units, and 3) understanding crowds and crowd psychology.

TRAINING FOR BIKE UNIT SUPERVISORS

SPONTANEOUS VERSUS PLANNED—IT MAKES A DIFFERENCE FOR THE BEST RESPONSE.

By Jim Dyment
The speed with which the police cyclist can respond and manage crowds buys time to make decisions. The police cyclist provides a constant presence with the crowd, which is a clear deterrent for criminal behavior. The mechanical advantage of the bicycle gives several advantages, most significantly the ability to keep up with these coordinated, fast-moving, and dynamic crowds.

However, despite our overall success at managing crowds, protestor tactics have recently evolved. There are also organized groups bent on causing injury and property destruction. They train to neutralize our bike tactics. Something as simple as the protesters increasing their speed by running or also riding bicycles requires supervisors to make faster decisions in order to continue to effectively manage these specific types of crowds. Doing so requires training and planning.

Preparing supervisors of these bike units to make timely and effective decisions that comport with policy and law takes specific training and a full understanding of the capabilities of bicycle units. This is especially true if these events are rare in your jurisdiction and you have little or no experience in dealing with them.

Department Policy and the Laws

This may seem obvious, but it is important for supervisors to have a good grasp of case law at a federal, state and local level. Contact your city, county or state attorney and go over some of these issues. In review of the various relative laws, supervisors should understand how that applies to strategies of enforcement and if their current procedures and policies support this. Sometimes department policies are more restrictive than the law; sometimes laws have evolved beyond policy.

As demonstrations necessarily involve freedom of expression and exercise of First Amendment rights, knowing the legal boundaries is paramount. It is important to have an understanding of current policy on Use of Force relating to demonstrations or riots. Do you have a separate policy? If not, reach out to some of the other agencies in your state to see what they have and find out how it has worked for them.

Understand that during large protests, there is a very real potential for streets to be clogged with pedestrian and vehicular traffic. This makes it extremely difficult for any car or van-based resources, including supervisors, to stay with your bike resources and the demonstration if it becomes mobile.

If field command is separated, does your policy, training, or approved procedures support your bike squads taking necessary action? Evaluate your policy as well as training to see if it supports the increased capabilities that your bicycle resources give you. When evaluating your policy, consider these questions. Do supervisors of bicycle squads have clear authority for necessary independent decision making? Are the Use of Force guidelines clear regarding crowd control? Are guidelines clear on respecting First Amendment rights? Are guidelines clear and specific on reporting actions, especially Use of Force?

This will not only assist the bicycle unit supervisor but also give clear guidance to the bicycle officers to make confident, informed decisions, which makes each officer more effective in his/her actions. Having clarity and understanding on what decisions you can or cannot make, with supportive policies, not only assists the supervisors in making timely, effective, and lawful decisions but articulating why they did that later to the court, your chief, governing body, or public after the dust settles.

Bicycle Demonstration Tactics

Those in charge need to be familiar with their bike unit’s training and tactics. This gives the supervisor and the bike squads a common understanding and keeps everyone on the same page. It is important to know what tactics the bike units have, why those tactics were developed, and the strengths and limitations of those tactics. Understanding the capabilities of bicycle squads is critical for supervisors to properly deploy the bike squads to varying situations that maximize the effectiveness of the bicycle units.

One successful tactic is the ‘Mobile Fence Line.’ This is a squad tactic that uses the coordinated movement (picking up the bicycle and moving it forward one or two steps) of the bicycle line to move forward. This is done in a manner that is disciplined, uniform and deliberate. This movement is intended for short distances and to gain the compliance of the crowd to move back and/or to gain space as needed.

The supervisor familiar with this tactic understands that it can be exhausting over long distances for the officers. Over long distances, this tactic will not maintain the same unity and discipline of movement, which will reduce the effect on the crowd. This may be a good tactic to initiate the group to move and then followed up with other squad tactics to maintain this move-
mment over longer distances.

The supervisor familiar with this tactic also understands this is not a passive movement, that your squad will be moving toward and potentially contacting the crowd. Not understanding this tactic could lead a supervisor ordering officers to take an action he/she did not intend.

Evaluate the protective gear the police cyclist has. There are products out there that are at least as effective as the traditional turtle gear and more protective that are designed for riding a bicycle. This protective equipment becomes necessary when violent demonstrations become mobile and support from traditional hard squads or foot officers becomes difficult or non-existent. Having well equipped and trained bike squads will give supervisors the ability to maintain a police presence with mobile groups, and therefore provide a key deterrent to property and violent crime by demonstrating a preparedness to take action.

**Crowd Types and Psychology**

There are a number of articles and books that go into the different theories of crowd psychology. Supervisors need to have at least a basic understanding of crowd types and crowd psychology can provide strategies to keep these events and groups peaceful, and minimize the need for larger and more involved responses by law enforcement. Understanding crowd types as to whether this is a spontaneous event, or a planned event will let the commander best prepare for how to effectively deploy bicycle resources.

Clearly, a supervisor will need to assess the specific crowd, the overall tenor, and any concerns about specific agitators within the crowd. However, a basic overall understanding of crowd dynamics serves as an essential starting point. For example, spontaneous events. A large celebration involving several thousand party goers after a National Championship of the city’s sports team has taken over a street. Understanding the potential impact the ‘crowd’ will have on the ‘individual’ will give supervisors the strategy necessary to manage the event.

One theory suggests the anonymity of the crowd affects the individual’s identity in a negative way. The individual will engage in behavior that he/she would not normally be inclined to, such as violent, anti-social behavior, as he/she takes on the lowest common denominator of the behavior of the crowd. One or two isolated criminal incidents within the crowd could lead to widespread violence and property damage. Many individuals describe getting ‘caught up in the moment’ and do not think about personal norms and repercussions their actions will have.

Supervisors deploying officers to efficiently manage minor violations and/or crimes in small teams bringing consequence to an individual’s actions will take the anonymity of the crowd away from the individual. These overt acts of enforcement will re-enforce consequences of an individual’s action and reduce the chances of the crowd contagion from taking place and will probably be a very effective strategy.

For another example, consider planned protest events. The supervisor has an opportunity to have an impact on what type of crowd contagion effect the group will have. Planned events will sometimes be organized with common beliefs, goals, and rules coming from within that event. The SIDE Model of de-individuation would suggest that the identity of the ‘group’ will determine the identity that the individual will have under the influences of the crowd. If the identity of the ‘group’ is promoting rules and lawful behavior, then the effect on the individual, generally, will be to follow those rules and to behave lawfully.

If the identity of the group is promoting violence and criminal acts, the outcome of individuals’ actions under the influence of that group will likely be the same. This would lead the supervisor to see the importance and benefits of being an involved stakeholder in a group planning a large demonstration, and work with the group to promote lawful behavior.

The demands of law enforcement have never been greater. Having to respond to and manage quickly evolving, coordinated, dynamic, and sometimes violent demonstrations and events is a reality that can happen in any jurisdiction with little to no notice. The evolution of the role of the police cyclist in crowd management gives the supervisor a tool with many distinct advantages in meeting these challenges and expectations. To take full advantage of this asset requires those who command a bicycle unit to have an understanding of the bicycle unit tactics, to understand crowd-related law and policy, and to have a basic understanding of crowd behavior.

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