

Focused Impact of
II Marine Expeditionary Force
Motorcycle Club Program

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According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), [nationwide] riders of "supersports" motorcycles have driver death rates per 10,000 registered vehicles nearly four times higher than for drivers of other types of motorcycles.¹

Marine motorcyclists are no less susceptible to these staggering statistics than non-military riders; however, the current II Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) Motorcycle Club Program targets too general an audience. Incident rates based on age, type of motorcycle, and experience clearly separate the community. Stricter regulations should be put into place to target the appropriate "at-risk" audience and to reduce the burden shared by experienced and/or older riders.

Background: Who is the Statistic?

Low purchasing cost, good fuel efficiency, enhanced self image, a sense of freedom and adventure, and adrenaline rush are just some of the reasons for the recent increase in motorcycle popularity. According to the Motorcycle Industry Council,² national new motorcycle sales in 1992 were 186,000 units; in 2004, new sales nearly quadrupled to more than 725,000 units. In 2006, 6,686,147 motorcycles were registered in the United States alone.³

Nationally, the number of motorcyclist fatalities has increased for the tenth consecutive year (1997 - 2007).^{4,5,6} While making up only 3 percent of all registered vehicles,⁷ motorcyclist fatalities represent over 12% of all motor vehicle traffic fatalities."⁸ Marine Corps-wide, motorcyclist deaths have been rising for the fifth consecutive year (FY04 - FY08).^{9,10} In FY08, motorcyclists constituted 49% of all motor vehicle traffic deaths in the Marine Corps.

Nationally, the mean age of motorcyclists killed increased to 39.5 in 2007.¹¹ In the Marine Corps, the mean age has stayed relatively level at 25.0, with a low of 23.5 in FY01 and a high of 26.9 in FY07.¹² II MEF noted that from FY06 to FY08, no fatalities were incurred in the "over the age of thirty-two" group.¹³

	Age Group				
Year	<30	30-39	40+	Unknown	Total
1997	860	556	699	1	2,116
2007	1,573	1,039	2,537	5	5,154

National Motorcyclist Fatalities by Age Group, 1997 and 2007¹⁴

Nationally, for 2006 and 2007, sport bikes, and the subcategory of supersports, have resulted in over 39

percent of annual motorcyclists' fatalities.^{15,16} In the Marine Corps in FY08 (only data available), 88% of all motorcyclist fatalities were incurred on sport and supersports bikes.^{17,18}

Motorcycle	Type	Total	% of Total
Yamaha R1 600	Sport	5	20%
Suzuki GSXR 600	Sport	4	16%
Kawasaki ZX600	Sport	3	12%
Honda CBR 600	Sport	2	8%
Suzuki Hayabusha 1300	Sport	1	4%
Suzuki GSX 750	Sport	1	4%
Yamaha V-Star 650	Cruiser	1	4%
Yamaha YZF-R600	Sport	1	4%
Harley Dyna Wide Glide 1450	Cruiser	1	4%
Yamaha R1 1000	Sport	1	4%
Yamaha YZF 1000R	Sport	1	4%
Harley Sportster 1200	Cruiser	1	4%
Honda CBR 1000	Sport	1	4%
Honda RVT 1000	Sport	1	4%
Honda CBR 954	Sport	1	4%
Total		25	100%

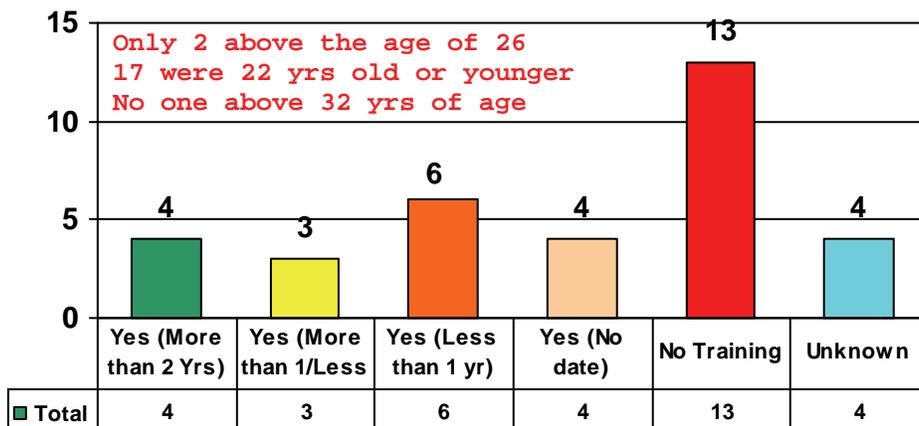
Type	Total	% of Total Motorcycles
Cruiser	3	12%
Sport	22	88%
Total	25	100

Marine Corps FY08 Fatalities by Motorcycle Type¹⁹

Marine Corps-wide in FY08 (only data available), 28 percent of motorcycle fatalities were unlicensed operators. This is not much higher than the national average of 25%.^{20,21} Though not drastically different from the national statistic, what stands out is that 44% of Marine motorcycle

fatalities had no documented training.^{22,23} Data is unavailable for national statistics.

In the 2008 report "Summary of II MEF Motorcycle Mishaps"²⁴ from FY06 to FY08, 34 motorcycle mishaps occurred in II MEF. Of those mishaps, nearly 56 percent were incurred by riders with less than one year or no experience. Only 11.7% of the II MEF mishaps were incurred by motorcyclists with more than two years experience.



II MEF Detailed Mishap Training and Experience Reporting²⁵

The analytical data shows that Marine riders of sport bikes, under the age of thirty-two, or with less than two years experience, are at greater risk to being killed while underway, than civilian riders.

What are the Marine Corps Regulations?

Under Marine Corps Order (MCO) 5100.19E Marine Corps Traffic Safety Program (DRIVESAFE)²⁶ all motorcycle operators

must be appropriately licensed to operate on public highways . . . must successfully complete a rider or operator course prior to operation on any DoD installation, [and] the training must also be completed by all active duty Marines operating motorcycles whether on or off base.

Active duty Marines must also possess and wear personal protective equipment (PPE) above and beyond that mandated by all states.

Under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) any Marine operator who fails to adhere to any portion of the regulations is subject to punitive action. ALMAR 014/08, "Private Motor Vehicle and Motorcycle Safety Requirements,"²⁷ imposes additional requirements. Marines contemplating a motorcycle purchase must consult with their leadership and be advised of the inherent responsibilities and requirements associated with ownership. Furthermore, Marines are required to "register the motorcycle with the Provost Marshal's office on the installation" whether or not he or she intends to ride on base. From there, individual MEF policies differ.

What is the II MEF Policy?

Under "II MEF Policy Letter 03 - 06, Subject: II MEF Motorcycle Club Program,"²⁸ all battalion/squadron and higher level commands are required to have a command sponsored motorcycle club. Each club will have a "primary program coordinator, or 'Club President'" along with club officers. Each club will have a charter "that describes the goals, objectives and/or rules of the club, as well as reflect the basic 'intent'." "(All Marines/Sailors who own or operate a motorcycle" will attend mandatory meetings held "at regularly scheduled 'on-duty' hour's." The goal of the program is to ensure that "our young warriors receive appropriate mentoring in motorcycle riding [by] leverage[ing] off of the experience of our most mature and seasoned riders." Moreover, the clubs are "designed to promote enjoyable, responsible, and mature driving behavior, for all II MEF motorcycle riders."

Proposed Program: What Changes are Needed?

Given the II MEF originated statistics and the national statistics, the evidence illustrates the Motorcycle Club Program should focus specifically on the Marines, regardless of rank, that are 1) Under the age of 30; 2) Those motorcyclists with less than two years of

experience; and 3) Motorcyclists with sport bikes and, more specifically, the subcategory of supersports bikes. Any rider meeting one or more of the aforementioned criteria should be required to attend each and every event the individuals' associated club puts forth. Failure to do so, without good cause, should result in the automatic suspension of motorcycle riding privileges on base along with a Page 11 entry into the Marine's record jacket.

As for the mentoring aspect of the program, instead of making it mandatory for the "mature and seasoned riders" it should be optional, thereby increasing the enjoyment and educational benefits for all. A "volun-told" mentor is never as enthusiastic as someone who chooses of his/her own free will to participate in the mentorship experience.

Counterarguments

Many of the opposition will argue that II MEF policy is too stringent. Prior to conducting the research for this paper, this author would have readily agreed as a former II MEF Marine motorcyclist. In reviewing the statistical evidence, what stands out, is not enough is being done to target the at-risk audience. Young, able-bodied and idealistic men and women are recruited daily for their fighting spirit and steadfastness. Marines are

taught to be risk takers in combat. It is unrealistic to expect all Marines to transition quickly from a risk-taking mentality to a risk-conscious mentality. With all the regulations already in place, the Marine Corps is still losing Marines to preventable motorcycle fatalities and mishaps.

Challengers to the recommended changes will also argue that II MEF's current policy does more than any other MEF to ensure the safety of Marine motorcyclists. By requiring Marine motorcyclists to participate in monthly club meetings II MEF Marines are more likely to analyze and reconsider risky behavior prior to, or while, riding. That is absolutely true; however, the program must focus more specifically on those at-risk, vice all, motorcyclists. At-risk riders comprise greater than 85 percent of fatalities within the three categories of 1) Under the age of 30; 2) Less than 2 years of experience; and 3) Riders of sport bikes.

Conclusion

A large number of the Marine Corps safety stand-downs in recent past have focused on motorcyclist fatalities, the prevention of mishaps, and documentation of previously registered and unregistered motorcycles. The time, cost,

and effort in making Marines is substantial, and to lose a young life is tragic. To mire all Marines in the excessive training and documentation only causes greater resentment and more angst about enjoying a hobby in which millions safely participate nationwide. The focus must shift from broad spectrum to specific group training.

Word Count 1344

Notes

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4. Umesh Shankar, "Some Insight into the Recent Increases in Motorcyclist Fatalities," *SMSA Business Meeting August 15, 2008, National Highway Transportation Safety Board Online*, <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov> Search 811031.ppt.

5. NHTSA Online, "2006 Motorcycle Safety Program Plan."

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