

THE RAWHYDE MOTOR OFFICER TRAINING ACADEMY

Put Your Motorcycling Skills To The Test



by Gary Prickett

Officer Kevan Harder (right) watches as a student negotiates one of the skill-building “mazes” at the RawHyde Motor Officer Training Academy. The best way to please an instructor is to get it right.

SO YOU THINK you are a pretty good rider, do you? Think your skills compare to those of a police officer? Here’s a challenge you can try if you want to make a comparison.

Find yourself a relatively deserted parking lot that contains designated parking spaces. Locate a set of spaces designed to fit four cars in a pattern of two cars side-by-side, nose-to-nose with two other cars side-by-side. Within the confines of that space, ride your motorcycle in a figure-eight pattern. Do you find it impossible to do on your bagger or other large-displacement motorcycle? Well, if you think that such maneuvers are possible only on bikes of 250cc or smaller, be aware that police officers accomplish these and even more complex riding patterns on their full-sized Kawasakis, BMWs, Hondas and Harleys numerous times each day in the course of their routine duties. And if learning this and other techniques to achieve a greater level of riding proficiency appeals to you, they can be learned at RawHyde Adventures’ Motor Officer Training Academy.

Located in the coastal mountains one hour north of Los Angeles, RawHyde Adventures has been providing training classes to riders of big adventure-touring motorcycles for the past five years. In early 2009, RawHyde was selected to become an Official BMW Motorcycle Training Facility—the second in North America and one of only nine such operations in the world. This partnership with BMW has afforded the opportunity for RawHyde to expand its part-time training staff, which includes a number of police officers. Two of them are full-time motor officers, and one is a member of the Los Angeles Police Department’s Motorcycle Training Unit responsible for training police officers to become motor officers and for evaluating existing motor officers who must pass mandatory periodic requalification tests. It seemed inevitable that these talents would be utilized to offer a “police style” training program to the public, and RawHyde now provides just such a course.

While the average police training program is four weeks in length, the RawHyde course is an abbreviated, two-day version, but it offers the same training that police officers must successfully complete before being allowed entrance into the LAPD’s Motor Officers Unit. I was one of the eight trainees at the inaugural training class in early February. Several of the class members rode their personal motorcycles during the training, while those who traveled from longer distances took advantage of the available rental fleet of nearly new BMW 1200, 800 and 650 GS motorcycles.

One of the truly unique aspects of a RawHyde training session is that the 120-acre parcel of wooded property on which the RawHyde operation is based can accommodate relatively large numbers of people without the group having to leave the confines of the property for living and dining accommodations. The indoor bunkhouse and kitchen/dining facilities provided shelter from the seasonal rainstorm that we experienced during my training, as well as ample opportunity for students and instructors to swap motorcycle stories and get to know each other.

While the property provides suitable terrain for the off-road rider training for which RawHyde is best-known, it does not have a large, open asphalt area that is needed for the Motor Officers class. For that purpose, the facilities of a middle school in nearby Castaic are used. A 15-mile section of the Historic Ridge Route is used to travel from the “base camp” to the training facility, which provided an interesting opportunity for some warm-up and cool-down drills at the beginning and end of each day.

For most of us, our vision of police motor officers is one of them zipping through traffic at a brisk rate of speed to chase down vehicles that have violated some traffic law. However, there are many times that motor officers need to precisely and effectively maneuver through obstacles and parked vehicles at speeds no faster than one can walk or run on foot. In these instances, you will seldom, if ever, see a motor officer paddle-walking his or her motorcycle. Instead, they are trained to perform these maneuvers with a precise, feet-on-the-pegs, ballet-like control of the bike that is both elegant and effective. Teaching that level of skill is the objective of the RawHyde class.

The principal component of the training consists of a series of low-speed drills that emphasize maneuvers in which the handlebars are often turned lock to lock while the rider continually moves forward through seemingly impossible confined spaces. Balance is, of course, important. However, even more critical is the coordination of the throttle, clutch and rear brake, each of these three control elements being gently and subtly modulated to accomplish the task at hand.

Upon initial inspection, the paved area used for the training looked like a sea of randomly placed orange traffic cones, but further review reveals a number of paths or “mazes.” Each introduces the students to new skills for negotiating directional changes, which must be mastered if they hope to get from the entrance to the exit of each maze. Of course, the objective is to “clean” each diabolically designed path without touching a cone, running out of the maze, placing a foot on the ground or dropping the bike. It’s easier said than done, but not impossible when the proper techniques are applied.

The final phase of training is devoted to a series of braking exercises, the objective being to bring a bike traveling at 40 mph to a complete and controlled stop within 60’. Also, for this exercise, the BMW’s ABS is deactivated.

Our farewell dinner was marked with a great deal of laughter and individual stories of challenges conquered. As with all training experiences, some participants did better than others, but all went away with the increased confidence that comes from learning new riding skills.

The next Motor Officer Training Academy is scheduled for Nov. 5-7, 2010. If there is sufficient interest in this program, RawHyde can schedule earlier dates. Tuition is \$1295, and includes living accommodations and all food and drink.

**Contact: RawHyde Adventures—
PO Box 244, Castaic, CA 91310;
213-713-5652; www.rawhyde-off-road.com**