



Riding With The Law

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I'VE ALWAYS BEEN IN AWE when it comes to watching police motor officers maneuver those full-size Harleys around in tight spaces. If you've ever watched motor officers, whether on the street or in a competition, you can understand why they're considered to be in the top percentage of skilled riders.

One great place to really see what these riders can do is at a police motorcycle competition. Many times, the best of the best in the region show up to test their skills against others. Okay, some of them are good enough to show up just to show off, but when you're a spectator, it's all good. I've attended several competitions and always thought it would be great to be able to enter such an event, but they've always been closed to anyone but police officers, active or retired. I have to say I was really excited when I found out there was a new competition that opened its registration to everyone, and the location was only about 12 miles away from me.

When a fellow MSF RiderCoach told me the event was being held for the second time in Brooklyn, New York, it didn't take me long to check out the information online regarding the NYC Metro Motor Skills competition. This competition was based on an idea by the Midwest Police Motorcycle Training School during one of its civilian training classes.

The event itself was over three days long with safety courses, skills classes, and plenty of practice time on the set-up courses for novice to experienced riders. Most of you know that it takes a lot of practice and training to be at least halfway decent at those slow-speed skills;

to enter into a competition could be more challenging than one realizes, considering what he may be up against.

Since I've never entered such a competition, I decided to play it safe and sign up for the novice level, even though I thought I could do better. I got to the event early on the day of the competition to practice as much as possible. At my first pass of the course, my eagerness — and probably ego — made me look like a rookie from Day One; I wiped out half the cones. So after taking a deep breath and realizing I needed to focus, I went for it again. After each practice pass, I got smoother, rising to the level that I always thought I was at. After some time, the course started to flow effortlessly, and then came the pre-competition talk about the rules led by one of the judges.

I listened intently and then got in line to be judged. While waiting for my turn, I was hit with what I always tell my students to ignore — nerves. Not sure how, or why, it happened, but for some reason I was nervous about being in the competition for real, even though my practice sessions were starting to become close to flawless. As I watched each rider ahead of me, I tried to focus my attention on them instead of the garbage bouncing around in my head. I had a dozen entrants ahead of me which

made that a harder task than I thought.

Well, my turn came and went, and I did not fare as well as I would have liked, but I got through it — kind of. I couldn't believe that my nerves actually did such a number on me that I had trouble focusing, but that was certainly the case. I have to say that the experience just bumped up my level of respect for these motor officers, as well as the civilian riders in this contest. Granted, the police have the opportunity to receive top-notch training and basically have constant on the job "practice" time, but they are still amazing on those two wheels and their ability to concentrate without looking like they are is pretty cool. The second important thing I learned that day was how I felt at the time of scoring: I now understand better how my students feel when the time comes for their riding evaluation. With that knowledge, I hope to accommodate them better, and ease some of their stress at "test time."

So I didn't do as well as I would have liked, but I did learn some pretty important things that day — about riding, others, and myself. Besides, the day was filled with tons of great riders competing at what they do best. Anytime you can learn something that will make you a better rider and, if lucky, a better instructor, plus able to see others exhibit skills at a far greater level, is certainly a good day. Well, now that I know what is involved, would I go back again and try next year? Certainly. I'll be there again, but next time, I'll get more practice, and I think my next attempt will be better without a doubt. If I'm lucky and pay attention, I'll keep learning, too. Keep learning to stay safe out there. For more information, check out www.NYCMetroMotorSkills.com. **AIM**