

# **Motorcycle Rider Mentor Program A Low Tech, Targeted Approach to Reducing Motorcycle Accident Causal Factors**

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# I. INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970's, when the Motorcycle Safety Foundation's Motorcycle Rider Course (MRC) started to significantly impact rider education, training emphasis has been on the physical riding skills with an introduction to fundamental strategies for operating a motorcycle on the street. The MRC, or a subsequent variation such as the Better Biking Program or the current BRC and ERC Suite courses, represents for most participants the only formal training they will ever receive, usually during the early stages of their riding experience when their frame of reference for developing comprehensive riding strategies was limited. Riding skills, both physical and mental, may improve to some degree with experience, but the techniques and street riding strategies that were presented during initial training will probably fade over time unless reinforced and honed to the point where affective learning takes place and the rider's attitude toward operating a motorcycle is modified in a way that is conducive to recognizing and avoiding accident situations.

Additional formal rider education courses that incur a cost and entail a significant support structure are unlikely to receive sponsorship or be attractive to the general motorcycling population. Therefore, mentorship is rapidly becoming the buzz word within the motorcycle safety community for continuing rider education. The Motorcycle Rider Mentor (MRM) Program is one of several recently developed to address the need. Although it is being used only by the Air Force in its present form, it has possibilities in other applications that span the motorcycling culture. It is currently being field tested at Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico.

This paper is a report on the MRM Program as it is currently implemented and planned. It covers the sequence of events during development, the program's organization, learning objectives and rationale for choosing them over others, mentor qualifications, instructional and administrative materials, predicted and encountered problems, validation methods and expected versus actual results. Finally, it suggests some ways to implement the MRM Program within a community of riders outside the military establishment, including a plan to "package" program materials for easy distribution via the Internet.

## II. OBJECTIVES OF THE MRM PROGRAM

*“Calling upon my years of experience, I froze at the controls.” – Stirling Moss*

### **Philosophy and Assumptions**

The goal of any motorcycle safety program is simply to reduce accidents. Of course there are many ways to accomplish that, even within the mentorship concept, but the devil is in the details. The stated goal of MRM Program is to *reduce motorcycle accidents by modifying the high risk motorcyclist’s behavior through a sustainable program utilizing competent volunteer mentors.* The MRM Program offers a method to easily distribute the collective wealth of knowledge and judgment from capable experienced motorcyclists to inexperienced riders.

**The target rider.** An examination of the wording of the stated goal reveals the crux of the effort, which is “attitude modification” of “high risk motorcyclists.” Although it is difficult to identify whether an attitude has been changed or whether a motorcyclist would take risks that would result in an accident, we make assumptions that lead to a manageable and reasonable probability of success. Those participants in the MRM Program who are not high risk motorcyclists still stand to benefit from the wide variety of subjects covered; nevertheless, they are not our reason for being. Our “target rider” is the one who is statistically overrepresented in motorcycle accidents for both the military and civilian sectors, those who are 18 to 25 years old. There is no discrimination based on type of motorcycle or engine displacement or gender of the rider because this simplifies the management process and presumably is more likely to result in a significant reduction in accidents. However, all MRM Program participants are properly licensed and have had some form of rider training, usually the BRC or ERC Suite. Participation in the MRM Program is mandatory for the military target rider and is encouraged for those over the age of 25. Although mandated participation would not be feasible in the civilian sector, this target rider profile must strongly influence the selection of training topics, objectives and the tone of presentation materials if the program is to realize its maximum potential; this will be addressed in another part of this paper.

Although the primary causal factors of fatal motorcycle accidents have changed little in the past three decades, the characteristics of our target riders and the influences on their lives have changed, making it necessary to adjust the tone and slant of training materials. Those of us who have been in the business for a while must recognize that this target rider is less affected by “old school” methods of instruction. These riders desire a challenge, often are prone to extreme activities and dress, yet want to make a positive difference in the world. However, they find few effective outlets for this desire to make a positive difference. They inherently distrust the establishment, and are strongly influenced by the media and their peers. Nevertheless, we need to trust them, to recognize their potential and perhaps equip them to lead those who are younger, and influence those who are older. The MRM Program will equip them to do both by focusing on creating the opportunity for involvement in a positive way.

**Club based program vs. unit based program.** In February 2004, after several years of seeing a significant increase in the number and severity of motorcycle mishaps throughout the Air Force, the Chief of Staff, General John Jumper, himself a new motorcyclist, issued a directive that put into motion an initiative that led to club based mentor programs. The details of the individual club organizations were left to the local bases and examples were provided to help them get started. Although this was a good start, it did not reflect the typical thorough military approach to such issues; heavily supported continuity training programs targeting critical pilot skills is one example where a comprehensive solution to reducing accidents has had dramatic results over the years. Inherent in the proposed club based program were several aspects that brought its sustainability into question, the key weaknesses being:

1. Voluntary participation by motorcyclists limits participation. Military supervisory personnel are very conscientious about doing the mission first and then dealing with other matters as best as they can. Our target riders are at the bottom of the food chain and are unlikely to get much support from a supervisor whose priorities will probably not include time off to attend motorcycle club activities. These young riders are not “joiners” anyway. They have their own peer groups for riding adrenalin rushes.

2. Clubs are inherently social organizations and focus their activities and energies on promoting social functions. If clubs are to bolster safety programs, their character must be significantly changed in most cases because their safety programs are typically shallow, such as getting everyone from point A to point B during group rides. This would not be an appealing prospect for the typical target rider.
3. The club proposal wrongly assumes that target riders actually ride with their mentors and there will be a transfer of good riding techniques and practices in the process. Successful on-street training is iffy at best and dangerous at worst. In the early years of the MRC, the MSF quickly dropped an actual on-street riding exercise from the course, and for good reasons. Mentors are not qualified to provide such training and are often taxed to simply stay out of harms way themselves, let alone keep an eye on a fledgling rider and effectively evaluate that rider's performance. "Monkey see, monkey do" methods belie the underlying complexity of motorcycle control and riding strategies.

The club sponsored group ride does not present a substitute for the target rider's "need for speed." Group rides are a different animal from those that dominate our accident statistics. The hormone-enriched airman perched on his crotch rocket will not be pacified by a leisurely paced stroll through the twisties. His judgment factor is, to a large degree, removed from such an event and is supplanted by the herd mentality necessitated by group rides. He doesn't see this as a positive reinforcement of the image he seeks. This is our target rider, and it is this attitude that we need to modify.

4. Club members could be required to pay dues. The clubs were to be financially self sufficient, separate from an official Air Force function, providing operating expenses and social or charitable activity costs. The target riders are typically the lowest paid ranks in the military.
5. Mentor selection criteria were arbitrary. Air Force policy was that "all squadron commanders will assign at least two experienced riders from the unit to mentor their novice riders." Rarely are squadron commanders

savvy enough about motorcycling to identify a good mentor, and even if they could they were not involved in the motorcycle club mentoring process, and thus were not cognizant of the club's effectiveness as a safety medium. If the club chose its own mentors, as most probably would, there was no standardized guidance or training to ensure objectives are met; it was up to the club to develop its own standards.

What this adds up to is that the club based mentor program is not sustainable within the military community and will not reach all of the target riders. The MRM Program was designed to avoid all of these negative aspects and employs a "unit based" mentoring program, keeping the operations within a small military unit, typically within a squadron which will have anywhere from about 50 to 300 personnel. This aspect of the MRM Program will be described later.

## **Measuring Success**

Most large military installations include a microcosm of the national rider population. Young military riders are representative of the skills, knowledge and attitudes of their peers across the nation in spite of living within a more disciplined working environment. However, the military working environment is conducive to implementing controls, observation and reporting that is difficult to implement in the general population, in effect creating a laboratory for testing and evaluating the MRM Program. The MRM Program addresses classic implementation issues by being lean and targeted. However, short term accident statistics can not be used to judge the success of the MRM Program due to the small sampling period and the possible impact of unforeseen influences, both internal and external, on the military community. It must be viewed as an experiment and initially evaluated based on the logic of its design and stated purpose. By the end of the first full year of implementation in 2006, the best we can hope for is a general assessment of the program's acceptance and a snapshot of its sustainability in a community that experiences a continual turnover of personnel every three years.

## **Database of Motorcycle Riders' Information**

A secondary objective of the MRM Program is to create a database of Holloman Air Force Base motorcycle rider information. This database will serve several purposes:

1. Provide an estimate of the number of street motorcycle riders on the base, listing the rider's name and unit. This information is not available from any other source. The current estimate, using the database and taking into account those military units that have not yet populated the database, is approximately 400 riders.
2. Provide an estimate of the number, names and unit of our target riders.
3. Provide a listing of by-name assignments of target riders to mentors.
4. List the type and date of formal motorcycle rider training courses ever taken by any of our riders.
5. List the make, model, and engine displacement of street bikes on the base.

The functionality of this database is limited by the availability of a MRM Program volunteer who knows how to program Microsoft Access to generate requested reports. Also, its accuracy is directly related to the willingness of the mentors to keep the data current. Access to the database is limited to mentors, commanders and key MRM Program personnel and is accessible from any authorized computer on the base LAN.

### III. ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION

After presenting an ambitious worldwide motorcycle safety program proposal to the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Manpower a number of years ago, the briefer was told that the request for additional manning in safety offices was nearly impossible, that it would be easier to fund a million dollars for the program than add a single manning position. In today's environment, not only will we not get additional manning to run a motorcycle safety program, but we won't get additional funding either. With that in mind, the fundamental guidelines for supporting the MRM Program were set, and the task was to design a program that extracts support from existing safety and command elements within the local military organization without imposing a significant burden on any of them. An outgrowth of that guideline is the Unit (usually squadron level) Mentor, upon whose back the weight of the program rests and whose task is to implement the goal of *modifying the high risk motorcyclist's behavior*. The mentor is the single most important person in the MRM Program and is the focus of most program activities.

An organizational and functional diagram of the Holloman Air Force Base MRM Program is shown below. Each element will now be discussed in more detail.

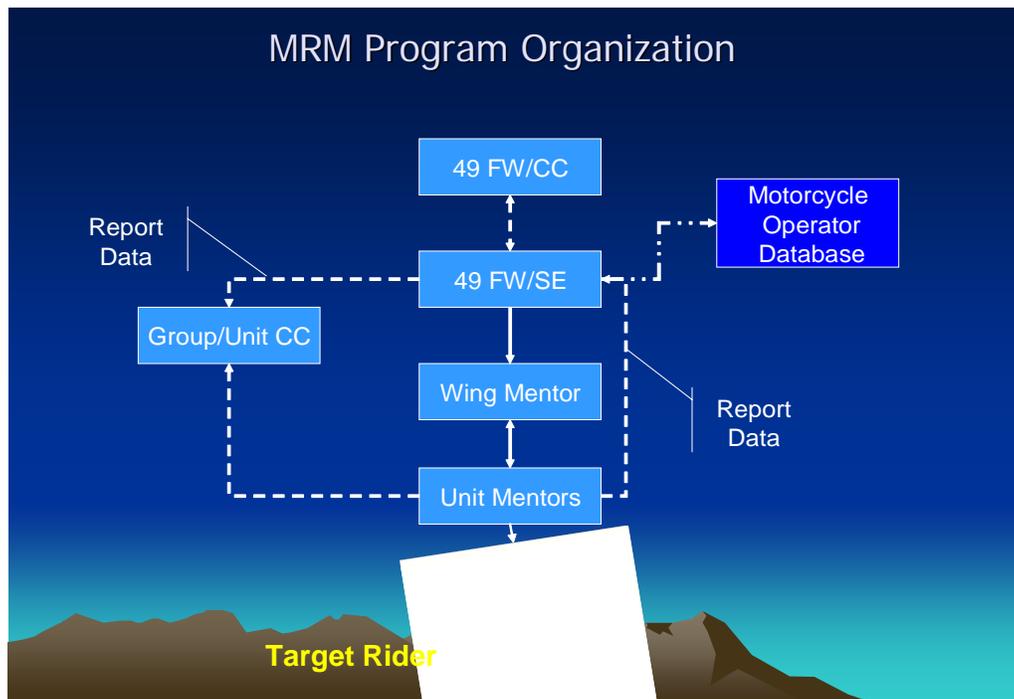


Figure 1 - Holloman AFB MRM Program Organization

**49 FW/CC** – CC is the symbol for commander. This is the 49<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing commander, usually a general officer, who commands the entire military installation, Holloman Air Force Base in this instance. Although not a key participant, support at this level is essential for official recognition and legitimacy for the MRM Program. The commander's policy letters and written directives are necessary if the program is to be sustained, as these may supersede the tenure of any one person in the entire organization.

**49 FW/SE** – This is the office of the Wing Safety Officer. Motorcycle safety programs fall under the jurisdiction of the Safety Office although the safety personnel assigned there might not know much about motorcycling (not the case at Holloman). The base safety office must manage the mentoring program at the base level, keeping an eye on who is actively participating as mentors and screening them as appropriate, channeling information up and down the organization, keeping tabs on how and how many of the target riders are avoiding participation in the program, and suggesting improvements to the program on a continuing basis. The safety office must not, in general, take the mentoring program upon themselves as their program. Although they might occasionally have an experienced motorcyclist on staff, the source of instruction must be from mentors who are distributed throughout the rider population. Therefore any motorcyclist assigned to the safety office should focus on management functions and perhaps serve as a Unit mentor. The primary functions of the Safety Office are to support and report. Support comes in the form of selecting mentors who are nominated by unit commanders, providing programmer support for the Motorcycle Operator Database and a motorcycle safety web site, inspecting unit level MRM Program implementation and assisting in problem resolution, staffing program directives for the general's signature, periodically conducting Motorcycle Safety Council meetings (a forum for mentors to exchange ideas and seek assistance), and coordinating with other bases and higher headquarters. Although this sounds like a lot of tasking, this is what they do best, but care must be taken to not over task them, since their manning is not predicated upon supporting the MRM Program. Their MRM Program reporting function is primarily associated with keeping the wing commander and unit commanders apprised of the status of the program by using data provided by Unit Mentors and the Motorcycle Operator Database. In the

absence of information on unit level program activities and status from the mentors, the safety office can not do their job and their support for the MRM Program will weaken.

**Wing Mentor** – This is the head mentor, a very capable motorcyclist as well as an effective leader, trainer and trouble shooter. The Wing Mentor is responsible for training Unit Mentors and spot checking their programs for compliance with practices taught in the training. This is the person who is responsible for developing and distributing MRM Program materials and is the go-to guy for requesting assistance with unit level program problems. This position requires a lot of time toward maintaining a high quality program.

**Unit Mentor** – This is where the rubber meets the road. This task will be explained in more detail under Unit Mentor Responsibilities.

**Group/Unit CC** – This element is usually a squadron commander whose unit hosts the MRM Program, thus the term “unit based.” There can be a dozen or more such units on a large installation such as Holloman AFB, each of which is responsible for implementing the MRM Program. Those units that are short on qualified mentors or do not have enough motorcyclists to justify having a unit program may combine resources with another unit for a common MRM Program. Such arrangements are coordinated with the wing safety office and the Wing Mentor. A “group commander” is responsible for two or more squadrons and may exercise the option to have a Group Mentor to assist the Unit Mentors, although this is usually a superfluous position.

**Motorcycle Operator Database** – This was previously described under section II, Objectives of the MRM Program. Unit Mentors are responsible for keeping the data current, including deleting names when people are reassigned. Information is used only to support the MRM Program and access to it is limited in order to protect privacy.

**Report Data** – Reports generated by the Unit Mentors go to the Safety Office and are the primary indicators that the MRM Program is functioning. Forms are provided for these reports. The Unit Mentor is also responsible for keeping the unit commander informed of the status of the MRM Program, thus assuring continual support at the operational level.

## **Mentor Selection and Training**

The mentor’s role is the most critical one in the MRM Program, but it is relatively easy to perform if an appropriate amount of time is devoted to it. Rather than expound on

the desired qualifications for an ideal mentor, it is more important to list the minimum selection criteria for the position, and they are:

**Available and dependable.** A mentor who is not present to perform the necessary tasks is an impediment rather than an asset. These tasks are monthly in nature. A minimum of one year of voluntary service to the MRM Program is required.

**Willingness to follow program guidelines.** The “best qualified” rider or “best qualified” instructor who has a personal agenda that supersedes that of the MRM Program is unlikely to be effective. The Mentor Discussion Guides and defined responsibilities are designed to be applied by the average rider in promoting the program’s goal.

**A competent rider.** The concept of role model is nebulous; the program is not trying to clone motorcyclists. The target rider is a bright and independent person who simply seeks facts that will make the riding experience better. The mentor should have several uninterrupted and recent years of riding experience in a variety of environments and have a relatively clean and accident free riding record. The point is that the mentor’s riding experience should not detract from the role; anything beyond that is beneficial but not necessarily prerequisite.

Mentor candidates are initially selected by unit commanders and proposed to the Safety Office for training. They are trained by the Wing Mentor in a four hour classroom session that focuses on the rationale for the MRM Program, the Mentor Discussion Guides and specific duties of a Unit Mentor. Included in the training is a demonstration and practice in the use of a Mentor Discussion Guide. They receive a certificate of attendance at the completion of the class and are added to the mentor list for the base.

## **Unit Mentor Responsibilities**

Although each Unit Mentor has the flexibility to tailor the unit’s program to some degree, there are minimum requirements that must be met. The mentor’s responsibilities include:

- Conduct a quarterly Motorcycle Rider Forum for the unit’s riders – Attendance is mandatory for target riders and encouraged for others. Forums are held wherever

it is convenient or feasible for the unit's riders and will vary from a break room to a formal classroom. Typically the gathering will last about an hour. The mentor must use the Mentor Discussion Guides to facilitate an exchange of ideas and techniques on the subjects. The mentor's task is to encourage all participants to share opinions and experiences relating to the topic and to build on those that support the learning objectives listed in the Mentor Discussion Guides. This will benefit not only the target rider but, to some degree, all of the forum participants. Coming from fellow riders, the information is often more acceptable to the target rider than if it is presented as the school solution. The corporate knowledge of a typical group like this will probably contain most of the factual information that is presented in the Mentor Discussion Guide; it simply must be brought into the discussion, which the mentor ensures. The mentor is a facilitator, not an all-knowing guru, and in some cases can be a minor participant when the discussion really takes off in the right direction. Since our exposure to the target rider is relatively short but consistent on a quarterly basis, we can't get into long drawn out discussions in the forums although there will be times when more than one topic may be discussed. This type of gathering has the potential for imparting good information to the target riders, but also has potential for imparting bad information. This is the single greatest risk of a mentorship program, but is manageable if there is sufficient guidance in the Mentor Discussion Guides and the mentor's selection and training process is adequate.

- Personally contact each target rider on a monthly basis – This makes the young rider aware that the mentor cares and is available for assistance, and it encourages the rider to think again about the information presented in the forums. This contact can be informal, such as a “chance meeting” in the parking lot, but should be consistent and typically lasts for a few moments. The maximum number of target riders assigned to any one mentor is ten, although it is usually much less.
- Maintain the Motorcycle Rider Database for all of the unit's riders.
- Send quarterly Motorcycle Rider Forum reports to Safety Office – This verifies that the MRM Program is being implemented. The report lists attendees' names, topics discussed, the number of target riders in the unit and how many attended.

- Keep unit commander informed of motorcycle riders' status – As the commander's advisor on motorcycle matters the mentor must tell it like it is. This includes reporting any known problems the riders have had, such as traffic citations or accidents. It can also be an opportunity to praise the contributions of those riders who are a positive influence on others and to recommend riders for mentor training.
- Participate in wing level Motorcycle Safety Council – This meeting, usually held once a quarter by the Safety Office, is where mentors exchange ideas and offer assistance to each other, such as sharing mentors across units. Aside from special events, it is the only place they get together as a group.
- Stay proficient in conducting all Mentor Discussion Guide topics – There is no substitute for preparation and new Guides are being developed. Additional resources such as the MSF Mini Modules series and accident studies are available on the Motorcycle Safety web site.
- Maintain exemplary riding and mentoring skills.
- Assist in training his/her replacement.

### **The Need for Legitimacy**

Documented guidance and the requirement for instructional materials for implementing and managing a mentorship program must be provided by the highest level in the safety system so that the program becomes embedded within directives to ensure continuity and to convince everyone involved that this is an Air Force requirement. Without such directives, the MRM Program lacks legitimacy beyond the limited lifespan of a local policy letter.

The local policy letter, previously mentioned in this section with regard to the Wing Commander, is a good starting point for this process and is usually initiated by the Safety Office. As long as it does not conflict with directives from higher levels in the Air Force, it is feasible to implement. As a matter of interest, Holloman AFB has received permission to field test the unit based MRM Program in lieu of the mandated club based arrangement for mentorship programs.

## IV. INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

*“The biggest problem with becoming a competent rider is that, when you are starting out, you don’t know that you don’t know much until you either hear about it or experience it. Frankly, I’d rather hear about it first.” – the author*

Before a rider can employ a skill or concept, whether it is physical or mental, he or she must first understand it mentally. It has long been understood that, after initial training, safely operating a motorcycle is more of a mental skill than a physical skill. That is why the MRM Program focuses on the “90% between the ears” part of riding instead of the “10% between the legs.” It aims at making experienced motorcyclists more aware of methods to deal with the hazards they face in a variety of situations.

### **Mentor Discussion Guides**

The nature of the Motorcycle Rider Forum where the Mentor Discussion Guides are used dictates that they be simple and portable, yet conform to Instructional Systems Development (ISD) principles. The lesson objectives must be more than broad stroke statements about riding, but must address accident causal factors in a way that the target rider can understand. Since mentors are not necessarily versed in technical or communication skills, it is very important that the instructional materials be adequate for the task, yet easily understood and applied.

**Design.** A typical forum would be convened in a small conference room. After some preliminary announcements pertaining to the unit’s motorcycle safety program, the mentor would start the first discussion, either using the suggestions in the Mentor Discussion Guide (see example in Appendix to this paper) or a personally designed lead-in that supports the same objective statement.

The Mentor Discussion Guides are designed in two sections with the preparatory information, for the mentor only, listed first. This section begins with a statement of the mentor’s **Objective**, then an **Introduction** that puts the topic into perspective for the mentor, and ends with **Discussion Considerations** which try to anticipate various directions the group will likely take the discussion, and problems the mentor might have in keeping the discussion on track. The second section, **Supporting Information**, contains information that directly supports the conduct of the discussion, usually starting

with an attention step that either gets the participants involved, or provides an overview of the intended method that the mentor will use to moderate the discussion. The mentor may choose to read the objective statement to the participants, or a paraphrased version of the statement. The Supporting Information section of the Mentor Discussion Guides frequently contains notes to the mentor suggesting methods to get the participants involved in the discussion; this can benefit mentors who are not strong communicators.

In lieu of leading the discussion as presented in the Supporting Information section, the mentor may use personal knowledge or experience to facilitate the discussion as long as it directly supports the objective statement. However, the bulk of the discussion should be carried by the participants themselves, and this is where having mature experienced riders in the group will pay off. The mentor must be cognizant of where the discussion is going and be prepared to direct it back toward the objective.

**Discussion topics.** The topic titles currently intended for discussion in the MRM Program forums are shown in the table below. These are modified periodically and are sometimes supplemented by special interest topics from the Safety Office. Nine of the topics are supported by Mentor Discussion Guides at this point, with the remainder being fielded in the near future. Topics are categorized as either **Core** (marked with \*) or **Helpful**, and are directed toward the MRM Program’s goal of reducing accidents.

Braking dynamics and techniques *	Stopping distance to avoid impacts *
Strategy for preparing for intersections*	Strategy for preparing for curves *
Mental preparation for the ride	Group rides – dynamics and pitfalls
Who’s at fault in your accident?	Common motorcycle accident setups *
Your learning curve - perceptions	Sharing your ride and your motorcycle
Where’s the threat?	Night riding problems
Are you different from the stats? *	Maintenance tips for motorcycles
Is a little bit of beer okay before riding?	Legal ramifications for the rider
The Traction Pie – Slice by Slice *	Protective clothing – traditional vs. tech

Figure 2 - Mentor Discussion Guide Topic Titles

Core topics involve affective learning and address the most common situations that result in fatal motorcycle accidents. Therefore the mentor is directed to cover every core topic once a year, and the other topics as time permits but hopefully within the same period. The reason that alcohol and protective clothing, mainly helmet use, are not considered as core topics for the MRM Program has to do with the particular audience attending the forums. Military personnel are subjected on a continual basis to several other training programs covering the topic of alcohol use, and the MRM Program will reinforce and extend that training as it pertains to motorcycling. The use of personal protective clothing, including an approved helmet, for military personnel is mandated by regulation, for both on-installation and off-installation riding. Although these two topics are important, their priority compared to the other MRM Program core topics as a causal factor in fatal accidents for this audience is deemed lower. Until all of the Mentor Discussion Guides are completed, the amount of time required to cover all topics can not be determined. Once done, the categorizing of topics as Core or Helpful may be adjusted.

Most Mentor Discussion Guide topics do not require supporting visual aids. This is in keeping with the desire to make the guides simple and portable. Some environments, such as a flight-line break room, do not have presentation aids available. Yet, some Mentor Discussion Guide topics, such as the traction pie discussion, require a graphic to visualize the concept. For these topics, a graphic supplement is provided in printed and digital form for the mentor's use. The numbering scheme and Discussion Considerations incorporated into the design of the Mentor Discussion Guides indicate when a supplement is to be used.

## **Administrative and Supplementary Safety Materials**

As streamlined as the MRM Program is purported to be, there are administrative functions that need to be supported to ensure that the data and activities are properly documented and promoted. A number of digital forms and PowerPoint presentations have been developed for that purpose, covering such areas as mentor training presentations and certificates of attendance, MRM Program overview briefing for unit commanders, attendance rosters for various functions, mentor's quarterly forum reports, and a mentor master list.

A collection of reference materials, as well as the Mentor Discussion Guides, is available to mentors for downloading from the base motorcycle safety web site. These include accident study results such as the Hurt Study, MAIDS report, NHTSA reports and technical papers, and Air Force policy letters and directives. There are also articles on safety related topics as well as MSF's Rider Education Training System (RETS) mini-modules. This collection, which is being continually expanded, helps the mentor become more knowledgeable and effective in conducting Motorcycle Rider Forums.

## V. PROBLEM AREAS ENCOUNTERED

Although no endeavor such as the MRM Program field test will be problem free, this one has gone surprisingly well. This is primarily due to the enthusiastic support provided by the Holloman Air Force Base commander and the Safety Office. The classic distribution of effort was evident though, with 20% of the volunteers doing 80% of the work. Several of the unit mentors have done excellent jobs in setting up their programs and offered assistance in other areas of the MRM Program. However, there were problem areas that impeded progress. Some of these were predictable but others were not. They are described here in no particular order of significance.

- **Personnel turnovers and deployments.** This is characteristic of the military community and is expected. Impact on the MRM Program is felt well before a mentor moves because the last few months are spent taking care of higher personal priorities. This made it difficult to assess how many active mentors were available at any one time. Sometimes the unit mentor position was vacant for an extended period and the target riders were not being contacted.
- **Mentor Discussion Guide development.** It is behind schedule because the author had higher priority primary job tasks to do. Estimated completion date is now Jun 2006, about a year longer than planned.
- **Wing Mentor position turnover.** This key position was turned over to a very capable individual who, within a couple of months was deployed to another location for a short period. The interruption was sufficient to break the momentum enjoyed by the program up to this point. It highlights the importance of the tasks assigned to the Wing Mentor.
- **Attendance at unit level Motorcycle Rider Forums.** This was anticipated and an attempt was made to get the unit commanders to assist, but the problem was either not getting the word out to the riders, primarily the target riders, or not knowing who the eligible participants were. This is related to the need for the Unit Mentor to identify every motorcyclist in the unit and enter that information into the Motorcycle Rider Database. Solving this shortcoming is critical to the success of the program and is being addressed.

- **Consistent reporting of quarterly Motorcycle Rider Forum.** Although many of the mentors are conducting the forums, they are not reporting it to the Safety Office like they are supposed to. Consequently, program managers are not getting many “warm fuzzies” about the implementation of the MRM Program. Those who are just watching the accident statistics are whistling in the dark.
- **The MRM Program is not yet legitimized.** It needs to be included in the Wing Commander’s policy letter on motorcycle safety. Many verbal and email messages have been sent to units requesting support for the MRM Program, but if it isn’t written into the proper directive, it is not binding. Fortunately the initial response from the units has been positive, probably because of the general’s urging, but that will fade with time without the written policy.

## **VI. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It has been less than a year since the MRM Program was fully manned with Unit Mentors. The types of problems encountered are not showstoppers because they can and will be resolved. The primary shortcoming has been not having a Wing Mentor who knows how to keep tabs on the overall functioning of the program and pushes the right buttons to get problems fixed. There must be continual communication with the Unit Mentors from the Wing Mentor in order to hold their interest and to assist them when they meet resistance at the unit level. If the Unit Mentor functions, the MRM Program functions.

It will take until the end of 2006 to assess the effectiveness of the MRM Program implementation, and another year to assess the impact of the program on the riders. In June 2006, a questionnaire should be sent to all Holloman Air Force Base motorcyclists soliciting feedback on the program and its affect on their motorcycling experience.

## **VII. OTHER APPLICATIONS OF THE MRM PROGRAM**

Although the MRM Program was initially designed for the military community, that does not preclude its use in another setting, such as a motorcycle club. To accomplish that, the Mentor Discussion Guides would essentially be unchanged, with some minor editing to change local geographical references in the Supporting Information section. The rest of the guide is generic.

The program organization would need to be modified to reflect the club's organization, with the attendant distribution of responsibilities. For an effective program, the MRM Program responsibilities must be shared. There is much to be done, even in a club based program, so it is strongly suggested that more than one person pitch in to manage it. The guides could be used as a prelude to on-cycle demonstrations and training for skills such as cornering and braking, which could be applied to some degree in periodic ERC Suites classes; this would require a qualified instructor to implement. The same could be said for corporate implementation of the MRM Program.

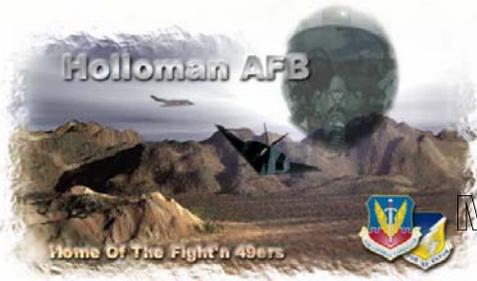
The rest of the Mentor Discussion Guides will soon be available online through the Air Force Safety Center for military users, and other sites to be announced by mid-summer 2006 for everyone else. The author is willing to make limited email distributions in the meantime, workload (and bandwidth) permitting.

## **APPENDIX – Sample Mentor’s Discussion Guide**

Mentor Discussion Guide No. 4-1

Title: Mental Preparation for the Ride

Topic Category: Helpful



## Motorcycle Rider Mentor Program Mentor's Discussion Guide

<b>TITLE:</b> Mental Preparation for the Ride	MENTOR GUIDE NO. 4-1
<b>TOPIC CATEGORY:</b> <i>Helpful</i>	VERSION DATE: Dec 05

**YOUR OBJECTIVE:** Inform the rider of the need for a personal technique for getting in the proper frame of mind at the very beginning of every ride in order to avoid accident situations.

**INTRODUCTION:** We are vulnerable as motorcyclists and obviously come out on the short end of the stick in an accident situation, no matter who is technically at fault. Therefore our responsibility to ourselves is to stay out of collisions with other vehicles, and to do that we must employ any method that will be simple, easily remembered and effective, so we are likely to use it every time we mount up. This discussion topic will present a technique for mentally preparing us for every ride, using our awareness of our vulnerability to put us in the proper frame of mind. During the ensuing discussion the rider will be encouraged to adopt a personal technique to use **during the first moments of each ride**, whether or not it is the example used by the mentor, and to employ that technique starting on their very next ride.

**DISCUSSION CONSIDERATIONS:** If you don't make them understand the objective of this discussion and continually get them back on track throughout the session, you will end up talking about ancillary issues that don't support your objective as stated above. Be sure you review that objective and have a clear plan for leading them through the discussion. Remember, we are talking about the first 30 seconds or so of the ride.

### SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

Attention Step -- We are physically vulnerable as motorcyclists and there's no way to completely get around that fact, in spite of protective gear and riding defensively. To illustrate that physical vulnerability, consider the following fictitious scenario:

***How secure would you feel sitting in a chair that is bolted to the grill of a Dodge pickup truck being driven by the best driver you know, through the streets of Dallas, Texas? Although this driver stands a better chance of staying out of an accident than you ever would on your motorcycle, and the truck is more likely to be seen than any motorcycle you own, wouldn't you feel vulnerable hanging out there in the breeze, no matter who's driving the truck?***

A little far fetched? Then think about how vulnerable you really are when riding on a motorcycle in traffic. Just look down at your motorcycle and the pavement rushing by under your foot pegs on your next ride and think about that. And on top of that, you're less likely to be seen

by other motorists than the Dodge pickup would be. Do you think that your riding skills make your body less vulnerable to the four wheeled manglers? No amount of riding skill is going to compensate for the loss of the protection you could get from riding inside a seatbelt equipped two ton steel cage. But you're going to ride anyway, because you've made that choice. Fine, just don't forget about your vulnerability, and try to find ways to increase your chances out there in the asphalt arena. That's what this discussion is about, focusing on the first 30 seconds of each and every ride you make on your motorcycle.

### A Simple Effective Action

**MENTOR:** Ask your group to think about the beginning of a typical motorcycle ride, specifically the first minute. Give them a moment to contemplate this and continue your discussion as follows.

What are you usually thinking about as you depart your driveway or parking lot. Were you thinking about the last thing that you were doing at home, about how you look, where you're riding to, how the bike feels, or what? These are all wrong things to be thinking about at this point! Why, because most accidents happen within 5 miles of home and unless you are going to avoid being part of those accident statistics, you have to get more than just the transmission in gear at the beginning of your ride. You need a **simple** (easily remembered and easy to apply), **effective** (directly helps to mentally prepare you to avoid an accident), **action** (not just a mental drill that can get buried by circumstances) that you **consistently** perform (becomes a procedure that you will perform, no matter what the circumstances happen to be). This **simple effective action** will project you into the role of a motorcyclist who is entering a high risk activity that exposes your body to an environment of two-ton manglers driven by well intentioned, but inattentive, automobile operators who are dealing with their own personal issues.

### For Example, the Brake-Swerve Drill

One rider explains his technique as follows... Right after I shift into second gear after pulling out of the driveway I quickly (but **almost imperceptivity**, to avoid a detectable change in speed or direction) "squeeze two and press two," then I "press right to go right, and press left to go left." These actions were part of the MSF RiderCourse techniques I learned for quickly stopping the bike and for swerving around obstacles, but I'm just going over the techniques in my mind at this point. Not only does this bring the braking and swerving procedures into my awareness through the **very slight** flexing of the muscles in my hands and feet, but it brings my vulnerability as a motorcyclist entering traffic to the forefront of my thoughts, thus arming me to deal with contingencies that might pop up.

On a motorcycle you must **put your attention where it will do the most good**, from the beginning of the ride to the end. Once it becomes a habit you will be a better rider; anything less than continually improving as a rider would be a compromise that you aren't willing to accept.

**MENTOR:** Ask your group to share techniques they use for getting mentally prepared in the first few seconds of a ride. This does **not** mean putting on protective gear or doing a TCLOCK inspection before mounting up, but pertains to the rider's mental awareness that this is a motorcycle ride and it requires my FULL attention - NOW. If they have none, challenge them to try the example technique and then follow up on another day by asking them if they tried it and if it made any difference in their attitude toward the ride. You are trying to get a commitment from them at this point, but if that doesn't happen, let it drop for now; count on their ability to comprehend the logic of the discussion and to try it on their own without the commitment to you.