



# RIDING



## DISPATCH FROM POLICE TRAINING

Learning Defensive Riding From The Pros **By Rocco Capoccia**

It's funny. You think you know how to ride a bike. But then you get introduced to a new program with different techniques and you realize you're still learning.

Wait, did I say, "a bike?" According to Doug Wolfe, chief instructor and proprietor of Midwest Police Motorcycle Training (MPMT), a bike is a Schwinn or a Huff. It's not a motorcycle, a machine, or in police parlance, a "motor."

I met Doug as part of my ongoing quest to improve in the fine art of motorcycle operation. I'm at MPMT in Troy, Mich., signed up for the entry-level Civilian Course. According to Doug, the difference between the civilian and professional courses are that the civilian course omits elements involving how, to a police officer, a motorcycle is a professional tool. To me, it's sport, fun and transportation, and the Civilian Class is tailored to those expectations.

Our first day starts with a brief overview in the morning classroom session, and we get to know Doug a bit better. He's an interesting character. His background includes a seven-year stint at Michigan State University where he was responsible for developing its Law Enforcement Motorcycle Program. He was also its primary test rider for all sorts of experiments on proper riding technique and situational analysis.

There are two main parts of the MPMT program: road speed and low-speed riding techniques. For low-speed maneuvers,

using torque is one of the most important techniques. Doug distinguishes between speed and torque. Speed makes you go fast, but torque allows you to properly control a motorcycle at low speeds. At road speeds, braking is the critical component. Doug says he can teach a monkey to ride at 70 mph, but he cannot teach it to ride safely if it can't learn to brake.

At the range, there are several trailers with Harley-Davidson Police Special Road Kings lined up in front of them and several hundred cones placed over an area the size of two football fields. The cones are large—think highway maintenance crews—and are far more intimidating than what I am used to.

After an explanation of controls and a pre-ride vehicle inspection, we get our first lesson in torque application and an impressive demonstration of Doug's ability to make this 850-pound motorcycle move like a 95-pound ballet dancer.

The drills represent typical low speed riding; U-turns, figure eights, 90-degree turns from a stop. I thought I would be fine because I practice these techniques regularly. However, I was wrong. Specific to MPMT's style, there is heavy emphasis on low-speed modulation through the rear brake. The constant rear brake modulation is new to me, and the tall cones make the ordeal much more difficult.

I'm looking right at the cones I do not want to hit. Two words; target fixation. As I



ride into and over the cones, I feel foolish. As I ride, I see my mistakes playing out in my mind in slow motion. I finally get it, stop looking at the cones, look through the turns and improve. Like most things, with each attempt, my technique improves ever so slightly.

On the second day, we start with individual practice of the previous day's techniques. Then, we move onto the road-speed portion of the training. Our first lesson is to learn what rear-wheel lock up feels like. We reach a predetermined speed and once crossing into a skid area, forcefully apply the rear brake, maintaining an upright torso and looking up and straight ahead.

Doug says that if the rear wheel drifts to the side, we should turn into the skid. Thankfully, for me this is the natural reaction. That—along with staying on the skid to prevent high sides—and keeping the field of vision up and forward, makes this drill less problematic than I imagined.

Next, we practice a brake-and-escape drill. Starting slow and increasing speed with successive attempts, we enter an emergency braking area then transition to low-speed techniques to evade an



## MAGGIE McNALLY ELECTED VICE CHAIR

AMA International Women & Motorcycling Conference Among Major 2012 Initiatives



Maggie McNally, the Northeast Region member representative on the AMA Board of Directors, has been elected vice chairwoman of the board. McNally, who has served on

the board since 2009, is the first woman to hold the post.

"Maggie McNally has played an invaluable role in the leadership of the AMA," says AMA Chairman of the Board Stan Simpson. "She's been an active member of our nominating, state chapters and awards committees. We welcome her expanded responsibilities on the board as we strive to find new ways to promote and protect the motorcycling lifestyle."

A longtime resident of Albany, N.Y., McNally is the third woman elected to the AMA Board of Directors. She follows notables such as Hall of Famer Hazel Kolb, elected to the board in 1978, who served as secretary. Following Kolb's

death in 1990, Patty Mills replaced her on the board and later served as secretary.

McNally was elected vice chair to serve the remainder of former Director and current AMA Vice President of Industry Relations Jim Williams' term, which runs through February 2012. At that time, McNally will run again to retain the post.

McNally says one of her major initiatives for next year will be promoting the 2012 AMA International Women & Motorcycling Conference, which takes place July 26-29 in Carson City, Nev.

"Women are among the most passionate and dedicated motorcyclists," McNally says. "For the AMA International Women & Motorcycling Conference, we'll work with some very enthusiastic individuals—those whose clubs and organizations will partner with the AMA as we work hard to make this the best women's motorcycling conference ever."

Registration for the 2012 conference is now open to AMA members at the early-bird price of \$125 through April 30, when it increases to \$175. Register online at [WomenAndMotorcycling.com](http://WomenAndMotorcycling.com).

**AMA**  
International  
**Women & Motorcycling**  
Conference \* July 26-29, 2012  
Carson City, NV

obstacle. Trust me, maximum braking in a short distance within a tight space, then gaining low-speed control to evade a hazard in less time than you can read this, is not easy.

I walk through this drill several times, coaching myself. An instructor tells me to stop over-thinking it. I manage to get two clean runs in, attain proper speed, stop within the specified distance, and clear out without hitting any cones. During several other attempts, I lock up the rear tire and am not able to escape. I would have liked a few more good passes, but Doug tells me he is pleased with what I've accomplished nonetheless.

We conclude the afternoon session with more individual practice. By day's end, the information is sinking in, the practice is helping, and I'm adjusting to a different motorcycle.

The remaining days alternated between low-speed practice and road-speed braking techniques. Once Doug is comfortable with every student's ability to emergency brake, the group is taken into traffic in a formation, led and tailed by the instructor team. We are taken to a private road that serves as an excellent place to

practice road-speed handling of curves.

During the final afternoon, we have more low-speed practice, then the skills evaluation. The test evaluates our ability to demonstrate what we learned over the prior days. There are no surprises. We all know what we need to do. We just go out and do it.

Having full control at all times over one's motorcycle is paramount to safety. Understanding how to execute and react to emergency braking at real-world speeds is a critical survival skill. Proper execution of evasive maneuvers can keep you alive. Improving your abilities in all three areas under the guidance of motorcycle police officers is a rare opportunity. I am already making plans to return for the advanced level courses.

Next time out, my sons are joining me. I want them to attain the level of proficiency I witnessed at MPMT. I will sleep better at night knowing they've received this training. I can think of no better endorsement. —Rocco Capoccia

For more information about Midwest Motorcycle Police Training see [MidwestMotorcycleTraining.com](http://MidwestMotorcycleTraining.com).

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