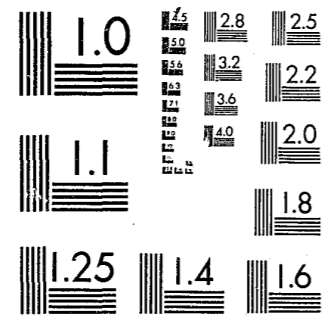


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# FBI LAW ENFORCEMENT BULLETIN

OCTOBER 1981

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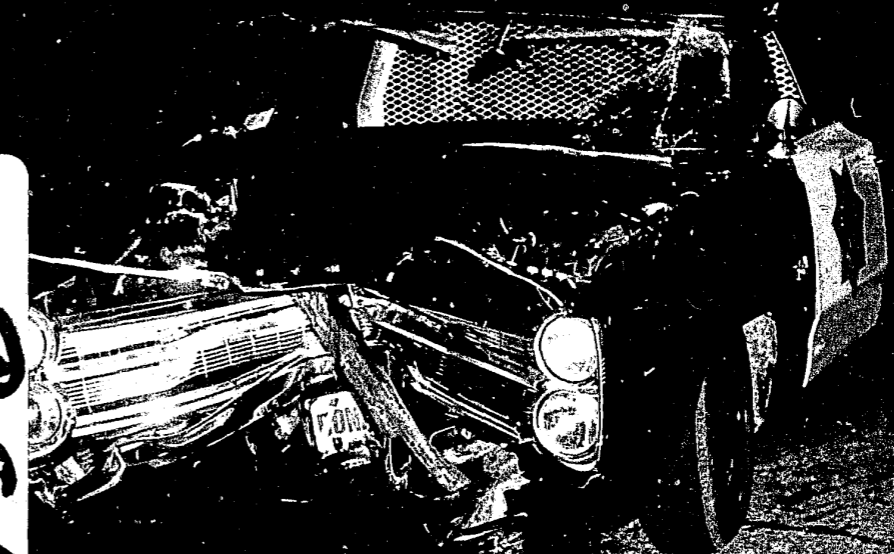
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## Driver Training For Your Department???

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Federal Bureau of Investigation  
United States Department of Justice  
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William H. Webster, Director

The Attorney General has determined that the publication of this periodical is necessary in the transaction of the public business required by law of the Department of Justice. Use of funds for printing this periodical has been approved by the Director of the Office of Management and Budget through December 28, 1983.

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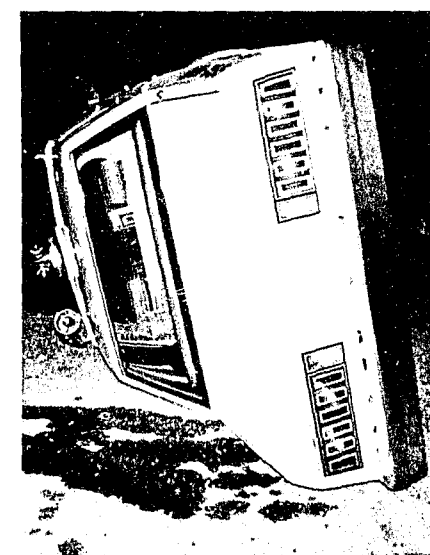
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By  
 LT. JAMES J. BARRON  
 and  
 SGT. STEVEN L. AURILIO  
 Police Department  
 Daly City, Calif.



Officer H. Charger was moving along at a substantial speed. With a year in the department, he was young, confident, and believed he could handle anything that came along. He was responding to a call about a disturbance in a bar. The last radio message indicated that his partner in the next beat had just arrived at the scene. Officer Charger flipped on the red lights and stepped on the gas. He had to cover his partner! And, after all, the call was in his beat and he could handle his own beat. The speedometer crept past 60, even though it was a 35 m.p.h. zone, but the traffic was light. Up ahead, the signal on Bismark Street had just turned red.

Frank Sola pulled out of his driveway at 20 Bismark Street, with his wife and three kids in the car. He headed down the street, with the windows rolled up, radio on, and kids fussing in the rear seat. A moving van at the corner blocked the view to the south, but the light was clearly green. He got into the intersection just in time to meet a 4,000-pound police car being piloted at 70 m.p.h. The impact killed Sola, seriously injured his wife, and left one of his kids with permanent brain damage. Officer Charger lost a few teeth, and the police car was totaled. Two years later the gavel sounded. The jury awarded Irene Sola \$1.2 million in general damages. The sum might compensate for the expenses and perhaps care for her brain-damaged son. But, she still misses Frank.

What are the chances of a similar mishap occurring in your department? As a police administrator, you might have already pondered such an episode. You may have even considered instituting a police driver training program and silently made a mental note that you would start on a program someday soon. Then, again, you may be an administrator who prefers to handle situations as they arise, employing a minimal amount of planning. Or perhaps you are an administrator who hopes that "it won't happen here." You may believe that a driver training program is beyond the needs and means of your department, since many small and mid-sized agencies have limited resources and manpower. If so, then this article is aimed at you.

It is not our intention to give a detailed description of a driver training course. The details are for you to decide and to tailor to your agency's structure and needs. Our intention is, however, to convince you to develop or participate in a police driver training program and to show you how to do it efficiently and economically. We realize the problems administrators face in justifying new programs and maintaining current ones, while having to work within a tight budget. Well, we believe this needed training can be accomplished by using the resources already available. Perhaps you are not convinced you need or even want such a program. Well, before looking at the "how to do it," let's take a look at the "why do it?"

Driver training, as with any training, is a product of sound planning; planning is a function of good leadership. Without training, proper performance is left to the "trial and error" method of learning, which is a costly and inefficient practice. An untrained police officer is an unprepared police officer. It's the supervisor's responsibility to insure that he gets the training to perform his job and to accomplish the goals of the organization.

Driver training is an area that has, for the most part, been overlooked by police administrators. Other concerns, such as weapons training, S.W.A.T., and hostage negotiations, have held

**"A trained police officer operates his police vehicle with competence and he arrives at his destination by skill."**



*Helmets and aircraft-type harnesses are necessary equipment in any driver training program.*

the training spotlight, which leads us to an interesting paradox. It would seem that the activity which an officer performs most frequently and which has a greater chance for error receives the least amount of training attention. To realize the disparity, one need only compare the amount of time a police officer spends operating his police vehicle as opposed to using his sidearm or shotgun, negotiating with a hostage taker, or rappelling off a tall building.

Driver training can and does reduce accidents. The very purpose of training is to improve the worker by optimizing his job skills and knowledge, increasing his confidence and proficiency, and developing efficient and safe work habits. Good, learned work habits are reinforced by a scheduled system of continuous refresher training and by supervisory evaluation of the worker's performance on a day-to-day basis. Soon, the worker exercises good work habits naturally, with minimal physical or mental effort, and the likelihood of job error is significantly reduced.

What happened to Officer Charger is not uncommon. It has happened before; unfortunately, it will happen again. What are the chances of it happening in your agency? Think of your newest recruit. He's young, eager, and ambitious, as was Officer Charger. Are you satisfied with your department's effort to train this officer to operate his vehicle safely? Are you confident of his ability? If he makes a mistake, can you afford it? Can he or his family? Mistakes with police vehicles can be costly.

A trained police officer operates his police vehicle with competence and he arrives at his destination by skill. An untrained police officer, on the other hand, arrives at his destination by luck. That luck sometimes runs out. It did for young Officer Charger. As a matter of fact, what happened to Officer Charger is not necessarily a misfortune that occurs only to new recruits. It can and does happen to veteran officers who have, over the years, developed unsafe driving habits. These officers are especially in need of training in order to break unsafe habits and to instill new and safe driving skills.



*Lieutenant Barron*



*Sergeant Aurilio*

Still not convinced? Okay, let's look at the "dollars and cents" of it all. Money is the most obvious reason for improving a police officer's driving ability. It costs money to replace or repair a damaged police vehicle; it costs money to pay for the damage to the other driver's car or property; it costs money to pay for officer's wages should he be injured and unable to work; it costs money to replace the injured officer; it costs money to investigate the accident; it costs money to fight law suits; it costs money for insurance premiums; it costs money to the individual officer who may find himself being held personally liable.

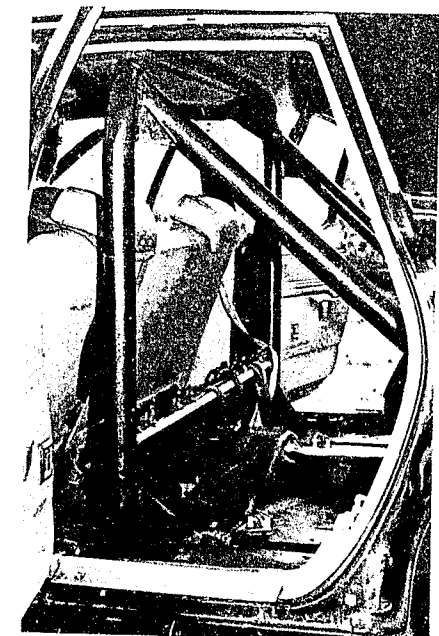
How about time? An officer off duty because of a job-incurred injury is not available. Manpower is depleted. If an officer manages to escape injury after being involved in an on-duty accident, time is still lost. He never arrives at his destination; another officer has to cover his assignment. If it's an assignment in which life is in danger, the accident prevents him from arriving. Officer Charger never arrived to cover his fellow officer on the disturbance call. It could just as easily have been an "officer needs help" call. The bottom line is that he didn't get there because he wrecked a police car.

Consider the loss. Officer Charger lost a few teeth. His department lost a police car. The city lost money to settle the lawsuit and will lose more money to insurance premiums. Irene Sola lost her husband. What can your department afford to lose?

Driver training can reduce the possibility of loss. By implementing such a program, our department was able to reduce the ratio of property damage to miles driven from .057 cents per mile to .017 cents per mile in just 1 year. We are talking about 41 vehicles driven well over 700,000 miles. However, don't envision 10 specially equipped police cars, a fancy raceway, and a

dozen cops and instructors drinking coffee and burning time. This was accomplished with one car, one instructor, and two students at a time, on a regular basis. Do it once a week, once a month, whatever your manpower allocation allows. The important thing is to get the people trained, then retrained at specified periods. The first step is the hardest—making the decision to do it. The program will flow from there; the officers love it.

What is a police driver training program like? It can include many topics. For example, inform the student of the laws and rules that relate to emergency driving. Let him know your State requirements and restrictions. Let him know your departmental pursuit policy, driving policy, or whatever. Also, let him know what happens to those who forget. Negative strokes also get attention. A swift, sure, and severe penalty works much better than a laissez faire attitude. Drive the point home with information on liability—personal liability that could get into his pocket. The "how to" of driver training can be discussed by lectures on skids, braking, turning, and physics. However, visual aids, such as a commercially available movie, cover the ground more effectively. An informed instructor can fill in the blanks.



*Patrol cars should be equipped with sturdy roll bars for officer protection.*



Chief David A. Hansen

No amount of talking can replace valuable hours behind the wheel. Commentary driving, a process by which the driver continuously describes what he sees, gives the instructor a clue to the driver's perception and causes the driver to become aware. You will probably find officers who don't attach significance to a child playing with a ball or the slight movement of the front wheel of a parked car. The officer may initially feel like an idiot talking to himself, but he will develop defensive driving skills. This portion of the training can even be accomplished while the officer and instructor are on patrol.

If you can acquire a location for high-speed driving, that's ideal. If not, give some thought to a skid pan or both. A skid pan is simply a hard surface sloped down with oil, water, or another slippery substance. With a \$10 wreck from the junkyard, your officers can experience handling high-speed skids while going only 10 m.p.h.

Cone exercises are useful to develop a driver's skill. Cones or pylons can be arranged in an endless variety of ways to build skill, confidence, and perception. The driver soon becomes aware that he can skillfully displace the vehicle by many yards, thus avoiding potential collisions. As he winds and backs through tight patterns, he also develops confidence and a feeling for the vehicle.

High-speed driving is more than just going fast. Some can do it, some can't, most will get better. It's important that the officer finds his level of skill and learns the potential of the vehicle. He will find his limit, then hopefully not get in too deep in the future. The student and instructor will perfect techniques learned in the classroom on the only medium that counts—the roadway. But your roadway will be in a controlled environment, not what Officer Charger met on Bismark Street.

From a driver training class you can diffuse into a variety of vehicle-related training situations. A siren and gunfire demonstration will awaken the duller trainee to a few realities of policing: Sirens are not very effective, gunshots can't be heard, and you certainly can't kill a car by shooting it. This is also an excellent time to practice felony stops, traffic stops, cuffing, and a variety of hazardous practices that kill officers each year.

What's all this going to cost? Surprisingly, very little. Most of the equipment may be on hand, and most of the training can be done on duty time or with compensating time off. The vehicle may be one that the department or city is about to sell. Old police vehicles are seldom worth much money and keeping the vehicle in the fleet is an excellent option. Besides, who wants to risk a new car? The car simply needs to be outfitted with a roll bar and aircraft-type harnesses. Most jurisdictions have facilities or someone to rig a simple but sturdy roll bar. Aircraft-type harnesses are safer than seatbelts and can be installed with little effort. Heavy-duty steel rims are recommended for high-speed driving, since some stock rims have a tendency to fatigue and tear apart at the bolt pattern. The vehicle should not be further modified. A race car with special features defeats the purpose of training an officer to operate a standard police vehicle safely.

Instructor training has several possibilities. Many jurisdictions have driver training programs run by the State or city. Often, these agencies will allow another department to monitor their program or even train an instructor without cost. The only cost may be accommodations and meals. After all, the instructor's salary will continue whether he's on patrol or at a training facility. Another option may be raceways and private concerns that offer private instruction. Perhaps they can use the publicity of associating their program with a police department.

Finally, but not of the least concern, how about assigning a mature, motivated supervisor, with some driving skill, to research the problem and adjust it to the department's needs? Formal instruction helps, but is not mandatory.

Finding a training facility may be difficult, depending on the locale. The ideal facility should have the same surfaces as found on your city or county streets. The object is to find a facility at the least possible cost. Try a county airport or a private airport. Some have unused areas that can be converted to your use with a few barricades. Some, especially the county, won't require a fee, but will probably require insurance or a bond. Many private concerns are

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**“From a driver training class you can diffuse into a variety of vehicle-related training situations.”**

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civic-minded and would gladly make available their facilities to the local police department. Private concerns include shopping centers, industries, or anyone with a large-sized parking lot. Think of what's available in the community. Perhaps that abandoned factory down the road is the answer.

Since officers drive at night, why not train at night when the parking lot is empty? Depending on the facility, insurance or bond may be required.

Vehicle maintenance will vary with the punishment your officers deliver to the car. They must be allowed to reach their driving potential, and this may cause some damage to the car. Consider the car as expendable, but repairable. Dents can be forgotten; tires need replacement. An aggressive program with high-speed training can grind off a set of tires in a day. A less aggressive program will extend the life of the car and reduce maintenance cost. You can count on broken tie rods, spindles, and tire replacement costs. But remember it's less costly to do it this way than to let Officer H. Charger experiment with a patrol car on a boring night shift.

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*Vehicle-related training situations can be incorporated into any driver training program.*

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Other equipment costs are minimal. Safety helmets and aircraft harnesses are a must. The helmets you might possess already, or perhaps a few of your officers own motorcycles and have an extra helmet. A training film may be purchased for under \$500. Traffic cones can be purchased outright or obtained from your street or highway maintenance department. You may need 10 or 100, depending on the type of program you design. It's amazing how many can be foraged. A first aid kit, fire extinguisher, steel rims, and tow cable are also recommended. Public-spirited organizations may help purchase some of these items if your budget is already allocated or has little chance of increase.

Training costs also include the salary of the officer, if you look at it in the fashion of a finance director. If your man has to be replaced in the field, certainly a cost is involved in overtime pay. But what if you pay in compensating time off, adjust days off, or simply rearrange the schedule? The object is to do it without paying several people a considerable sum of money. By training only a few at a time, even a very small department can adjust. Some might even get volunteers. Most officers love the program.

We can't estimate a cost for an average program, but you can determine the cost for your program. Consider what you want. Do you need high-speed driving or just want a defensive driver program with a few cone exercises and commentary driving? Have someone estimate the cost items mentioned. Perhaps you can join with other jurisdictions to defray expenses. Is it worth it? Compare it against what you're paying for broken police cars and the potential for even greater liability. One bad accident and you could pay for years to come.

Police agencies would never give an officer a gun and send him out on the street unless that officer was trained to use that gun. Link the same reasoning to emergency vehicles. A car in the hands of an untrained officer is just as deadly as a gun. In fact, a car can be more deadly merely because of the respect given to firearms by those who handle them. Unfortunately, a similar amount of respect is not given to emergency vehicles by their handlers.

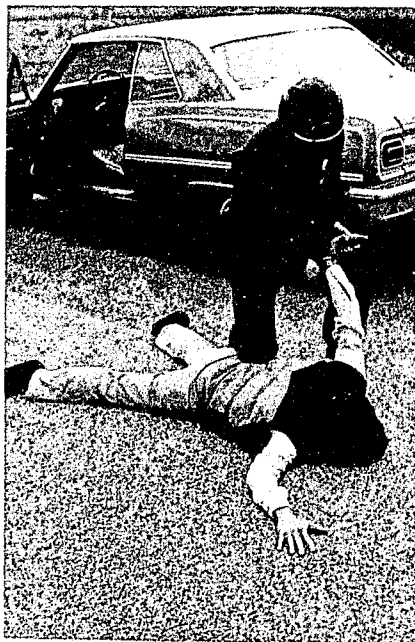
A decade ago, training was considered a luxury that only few police departments could afford. Today, it is a necessity that few could afford to do without. Let's face facts. Police administrators spend valuable time, money, and effort to train their personnel to handle a myriad of situations on the street. Yet, unless the officer assigned to handle such calls arrives safely, all his training is wasted. The first factor to consider is getting the officer to where he is going. He must get there quickly and safely. This is the prime aim of a driver training program. **FBI**

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