

A DIFFERENT KIND OF BAYWATCH

Story and photos: Tony Donaldson



Bike officers David Sarega (L) and Michael Striek.

Like many other beach communities, the Newport Beach Police Department relies heavily on bicycles for use in their daily patrols. Why? Because the upscale beach community in Orange County is gridlocked with traffic during the busy

summer season. Patrol cars often can't move, and motorcycles are still slower getting through the streets crowded with cars and beachgoers. It's too large of an area for foot patrols to be effective.

While traditional bicycles have

been in use for many years, they have recently started implementing electric bikes. Joe Carter of Pedego Corona Del Mar approached Newport Beach Police Chief Jay Johnson about outfitting some special bikes for the police department. Jay and his family had rented from Joe's



Training officer Striek teaches officers to correctly and quickly descend stairs. The Suntour XCR fork with 120mm of travel takes up the stairs in the front, but with the aluminum frame, the rear suspension is all in the legs.

store before and liked the bikes.

They outfitted and customized a couple of Pedego bikes for the department. They used them for about two years and found that they could go places much faster than they could on a traditional bike, responding to calls from

other officers or dispatch. Now Pedego makes the Ridge Rider mountain bike, and they offered to swap out the older bikes for the newer design. The officers love the new bikes, saying they're a big improvement over the originals.

The department has several bicycle

officers, but not just anyone is ready for patrolling on two wheels.

IN TRAINING

Chiseled and friendly, Officer Michael Striek is the training officer for the department. He is charged with having

the officers ready for the field. Training includes bike-handling skills ranging from traffic safety and speed to descending and ascending stairs, even standing perfectly still and balanced, as well as interacting with the public (kids often unknowingly run in front of the officers). They also have to know the proper way to tactically dismount the bike to be ready to run after someone, slide takeout to stop a fleeing suspect or even assume a stable firing position right off the bike if necessary. They're as easy on the bikes as they can be, but public safety comes first.

The bulk of the training process takes a mere two days, but Striek says it is a bit fun to watch officers who haven't been on a bike in months or years, especially on day two. A couple of full shifts—especially when training on steep hills and over stairs and with headwinds, coupled with some saddle soreness—are truly baptism by fire for some officers.

PERFECT ASSISTANCE

The electric bikes are already proving to be a major asset. Non-electric bikes are largely full-suspension mountain bikes outfitted with bags and lights to carry all the things an officer will need, from citation books to emergency gear, plus radios, etc. There's an additional 50–70 pounds of gear that the officers must carry on the bikes and on their person.

Imagine the officers getting a call to assist another officer a mile away. Schlepping that much stuff, quickly, over that distance, means that the officer will likely be tired by the time he/she arrives. The electric bikes allow the officers to cover that distance faster and with a tremendous amount of assist, leaving a lot more energy to help out another officer when they arrive.

The police version of the Ridge Rider has the same six levels of assist, but the speed limiter is set a touch higher than a consumer version. If they're pursuing someone on an electric bike, this comes in handy. It doesn't seem to affect range. Striek put in 40 miles the first day using high levels of assist and returned with about 20 percent of the battery left. That's a pretty good range, and he says it was above-average use.

The 48-volt, 11-amp-hour batteries are removable. In the month or so they've been using them, they've not had to swap a battery during a shift. The rear hub is a 500-watt Pedego motor with a torque sensor to help the Shimano SLX 20-speed drivetrain motivate the bike.

The police lights are specially made for law enforcement by NiteRider and run on a separate battery. The blue/red light covers flip up to allow maximum brightness on the dual-purpose, dual-light system.



The hard-packed sand allows the officers to ride right along the shoreline. Not a bad day at the office by any measure.



Sometimes, to get around quicker, the officers will take the ferry across the Newport Bay.



Being on the bikes allows the officers to not only get through heavy traffic easily, but it also allows them to easily interact with the public.





The bikes look like a normal Pedego Ridge Rider, other than the police colors and logos. And for the most part, they are.



Newport Beach's nature preserve is an amazing setting and a beautiful and quick way to get back to headquarters.



Their powerful dual night lights/police lights are powered by a completely separate NiteRider system.

THE MODERN POLICE CRUISER

Officer Striek let me ride the bike a bit, and with all the extra gear, it's fast and pretty nimble. The power kicks in smoothly, and the 120mm travel Suntour XCR fork absorbs plenty of bumps. The aluminum frame is quite stiff, so it requires being out of the saddle a lot to use your legs to dampen the rear. The battery up front and rear drive balance pretty well, even with it being a bit rear-heavy with the extra police gear.

The 27.5-inch wheels with off-road tires cruise the bike paths, streets, off-road and even on the hard-packed sand with ease. Since the boardwalk is always covered in sand, slick tires just aren't an option. Hydraulic Magura 180mm disc brakes are very responsive and stop the bike on a dime, even with the extra weight. Flat out on a flat road, they've had the bikes to about 27 mph with pedaling and electric assist. Down local thoroughfare Jamboree Road, they've hit 37+.

The officers often ride the bikes without assist, slowly enjoying the beautiful scenery and interacting with locals and tourists. Striek's preference is to have the bike set to throttle-only assist so he can feather it to his needs. They're often navigating through heavy crowds, and sometimes the torque sensor can offer more power than they want in those situations.

Officer Brandon Rodriguez says he tries not to get too accustomed to the power of the electric bike, using it mainly for hills and emergencies, fearing he'll like it too much and need one for off-duty life. He leaves it off most of the time and throws the bike around like he's having fun. Enjoying the ride improves bike skills.

Riding along the beach all day, sometimes even on the beach itself, makes for an incredible work environment. None of the guys have any complaints about where they work, and each keeps in mind the old adage, "Life's a beach." ■



Bike officers David Sarega (L) and Michael Striek in the bike storage room at the Newport Beach Police Department headquarters.