

NEW!

MILITARY SPO



Photo by MCC David Rush. Modified.

By April Phillips

There's no doubt about it. Sport bikes are sexy. They are sleek and colorful and built for speed. For Sailors and Marines, many of whom are naturally attracted to an adrenaline rush, this is a huge selling point. However, these same features make riding sport bikes much different than handling cruisers or touring bikes. Mishap statistics show it's important to take these differences into account. That's why the Naval Safety Center partnered with the Motorcycle Safety Foundation to create the Military Sport Bike Course specifically for sport bike riders.

"These bikes come with engines that are 600, 800, 900cc or even higher," said Dale Wisnieski, a motorcycle safety specialist at the Naval Safety Center. He also explained that these bikes have engines tuned for racing, are made of advanced lightweight material, and are highly maneuverable.

While they may be more maneuverable, they do ride differently than cruisers or other types of motorcycles. That's why this new training is so crucial.

"This course will teach cornering, braking and swerving, and other things necessary to get the most out of your sport bike," Wisnieski said. "Also, it gives insight on rider behaviors and perception."

Fleet concentration areas such as Norfolk, San Diego, and many other locations will begin teaching the course

June 1, 2008, and it will expand rapidly thereafter. The course includes classroom time as well as practical experience out on the range. The aggressive approach is due to the fact that so many Sailors and Marines are buying these machines without much riding experience.

"It's common for someone who has never been on a motorcycle of any type to fall for peer pressure or advertising pitches and buy a very expensive, very powerful bike," Wisnieski said. "If you buy one, sign up for this course immediately."

Statistics show that the increased number of sport bikes on the road has had an effect on mishap rates. The rise in sport bike popularity corresponds to a rise in motorcycle fatalities. In 2007, a majority of fatalities involved sport bikes, and as of the first half of fiscal year 2008, 100 percent of fatalities in the Navy occurred on sport bikes. The Naval Safety Center believes this new course geared specifically to sport bikes will help reverse this disturbing trend by giving riders valuable experience.

Many sport bike riders are young and haven't been riding long, but this isn't universally true. Aviation Electrician's Mate Senior Chief (AW) Calvin Stone, a 37-year-old who has ridden motorcycles off and on for more than 15 years, recently purchased a sport bike.

"I love the fact that it's so much lighter and more responsive than a larger bike, plus, who doesn't like the

SPORT BIKE TRAINING COURSE

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speed when merging onto the highway or passing slower traffic?” he said.

Speed is the number one reason Sailors and Marines give when opting for sport bikes. ET3 Kevin Jordan, who rides a Kawasaki ZZR600, admits that’s why he bought one, even though he’d never ridden before.

Since purchasing his bike, Jordan has done the smart thing and taken riding courses. He said he’s always looking for ways to be a smarter motorcyclist and plans to take the Military Sport Bike Course as soon as it’s available.

The course will teach riders how to comfortably handle these high-performance machines, but Stone also recommends that those with a need for speed find appropriate venues.

“Take it to the track. There are many available where you can go for the day and ride fast in a controlled environment.”

The Naval Safety Center also recommends track days, but Don Borkoski, another motorcycle safety specialist,

said many Sailors and Marines are buying bikes faster than those ridden by some racers.

“The typical racetrack bike is 600cc. The average Sailor is buying one that’s 1000cc or above. These bikes are great and can be a lot of fun, as long as you maintain awareness of the consequences of that kind of speed,” he said.

And ultimately, speed comes from your throttle hand. The responsibility lies with the rider, not the machine. Naval Safety Center motorcycle specialists like Wisnieski and Borkoski emphasize that they do not want to discourage Sailors and Marines from riding these types of bikes as long as they are trained.

“This isn’t your grandfather’s motorcycle safety course,” Wisnieski said. “This is exciting. The fleet asked for it because sport bikes are the bikes that they’re buying and riding. We listened and designed the training specifically for them and their needs. We really believe this is going to go a long way toward improving the success rates for sport bike riders, keeping them on the road and out of the hospitals or morgues.” ■