

1967

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### Recommended Citation

Johannes F. Spreen, Motor Scooter--An Answer to a Police Problem, 57 J. Crim. L. Criminology & Police Sci. 349 (1966)

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# POLICE SCIENCE

## THE MOTOR SCOOTER—AN ANSWER TO A POLICE PROBLEM

JOHANNES F. SPREEN

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“... the rugged and versatile scooter opens new vistas in crime control. As its use grows it is anticipated that the ‘scooter patrol’ will provide unprecedented control over crime and criminals in all our far-flung recreational areas.”

*Michael J. Murphy, 1964*

*Police Commissioner, New York City*

“The scooter is the most effective police patrol technique which has been developed in recent years. It preserves the concept of the foot patrolman and yet provides a mobility and responsiveness which the foot patrolman lacks.”

*Vincent L. Broderick, 1965*

*Police Commissioner, New York City*

These far-reaching statements by two former police commissioners of New York City, plus the development of scooter patrol which followed, have brought a response from many cities in the United States and foreign countries for information and specific operational techniques. The two-wheeled motor scooter is not just a “gimmick.” It is more than a device which has temporarily captured the imagination of the press and the public.

We believe the motor scooter is a new approach to solving a perennial problem: how to extend the *range of activity of available police personnel at minimum expense.*

Three factors—expense, personnel, activity—abide in most administrative decisions and the greatest of these is expense. Too often, solutions to police problems have been shunted aside by cost considerations. If the expense factor can be overcome, the administrator can then concentrate on a possible combination of the other factors of personnel and activity to achieve more successful policing of his city.

The two-wheeled motor scooter combines in the concept of its use all three factors.

### EXPENSE FACTOR

The low cost of the scooter is immediately attractive to the police administrator, the budget comptroller and the public. This unusual consensus is based primarily on the contrast between the relatively high purchase price of the standard radio car and the low price of the scooter. Scooters are a bargain; six vehicles for the price of one.

### PERSONNEL FACTOR

Manpower is essential but costly. About 90% of the average police budget is set aside for personal service (salaries and pensions). In the interest of economy, the police administrator generally has to make do. He must do more with what he has. Yet, the two-man car, while at times a necessity, eats up manpower. One-man car operation has been assailed as increasing the hazard to the operator. Foot patrol is costly—and perhaps somewhat archaic.

Can the scooter provide an answer? The basic premise involved in the scooter program is that foot patrolmen, unless on fixed or special posts, can be aided by the use of motor scooters to cover infinitely greater territory than heretofore. Coupled with a two-way radio communication system, this machine provides a considerable increase in police coverage *with the same available manpower* at minimum expense.

### ACTIVITY FACTOR

A number of operational methods were tried during our scooter patrol experiments, i.e., first in park and beach areas, then on streets and

other terrain. From these experiments, one particular method emerged as the most efficient and effective preventative patrol: a precinct scooter team-unit.

Under the concept of scooter patrol, as developed by the New York City Police Department, patrolmen are not assigned to the vehicles; rather, the vehicles are assigned to the patrolmen. The scooter is considered merely a supplementary item of equipment. Essentially, the scooter patrolman remains a foot patrolman, but he now patrols an extended area embracing several foot posts and may put aside his scooter when necessary to patrol on foot.

In police history, foot patrol has always been considered the "backbone" of the police effort and, though now on wheels, the foot patrol philosophy with all its past meaning of constructive rapport is retained. The scooter merely expands coverage. This philosophy is inculcated in all personnel in the program, supervisory and subordinate. The scooter patrolman thus is not a specialist but remains the all-around, all-purpose police officer covering a neighborhood area in the old tradition of the "cop on the beat."

#### DEVELOPMENT AND PRESENT STATUS OF PROGRAM

The New York City Police Department two-wheeled scooter program began in the Spring of 1964 in Central and Prospect Parks with nine scooters. Significant decreases in robbery and other crimes were noted during a four-month trial period. Good results continued in the Spring and Summer of 1965. On September 1, 1965, 50 additional scooters enabled the department to expand the program to 17 precincts, still primarily for park patrol. Recommendations were solicited from the precinct commanding officers, and the results were evaluated. Each of the 17 commanders reported favorably and requested that the program be continued.

Beginning October 20, 1965, the program was tested for general street patrol in 15 selected precincts. Again, all commanding officers reported favorably and requested continuance of the program. On November 5, 1965, a Tactical Scooter Unit experiment in patrol team-unit operations began. Using six scooters, ten radio-equipped patrolmen began a seven-day-week coverage in the 7th Precinct, a populous and congested metropolitan area on the lower East Side of New York. This was the first time that all scooter patrolmen carried two-way radios. The results—a welding

of men, radios and scooters into a team-unit operation—were above expectations. The commanding officer of the 7th Precinct reported: "This is the greatest advance in policing since the advent of the radio motor patrol car."

Shortly thereafter, 30 scooters were assigned to traffic duty in the Safety Division to improve vehicular traffic conditions in the midtown Manhattan area.

The approaching winter weather, the holiday season congestion, and, above all, the fact that for the first time some patrolmen were "drafted" for scooter duty were three factors not calculated to insure success. The operators, however, after training, quickly became enthusiastic. The dexterity and maneuverability of the scooters in heavy traffic contributed to a welcomed easing of this annual traffic burden in the heart of Manhattan. The commanding officer of the Safety District reported: "their achievements were far greater than anticipated."

#### THE TACTICAL SCOOTER UNIT—TEAM PATROL

The 7th Precinct, in which the Tactical Scooter Unit was formed, is a relatively high crime area with more than its share of traffic congestion. It had recently been in the press spotlight because of a series of assaults and intimidations upon rabbis and rabbinical students during afternoon hours.

Ten men, using six scooters, worked 10 A.M. to 6 P.M. tours, seven days a week. Each man was provided with a portable two-way radio carried on a strap slung over his shoulder. A base station for transmitting and receiving was installed on the precinct station house desk. Radio contact was now possible, not only with the precinct station house, but with one another.

The result was a tactical team. A flying unit of scooter patrolmen was able to move in concert by keeping in constant radio touch. The former walking cop was not alone—his teammates could now respond in immediate back-up support if he needed assistance.

The new scooter patrolmen operated either as partners (team) or as a group (unit) according to need, and always under the knowledge, direction, and control of the local precinct commander via two-way radio.

New concepts of team patrol are being experimented with. The aim is to create both an omnipresence and a high-surprise potential on patrol.

The teams are encouraged to develop various

patterns of street patrol—to be systematically unsystematic. One such predetermined pattern was worked out for two men to ride parallel avenues. The pattern is to proceed three blocks, turn into a side street, meet, and continue on to exchange avenues; two blocks later the same procedure; then after one block. This results in two faces on an avenue rather than one, adds interest for the men, increases alertness, and makes for an illusion of omnipresence.

The scooter patrolmen improvise on and change their patterns of street patrol much as baseball or football players adapt set plays to meet rapidly changing conditions.

Within a precinct, teams can be organized for group operations; precinct units can quickly be welded into a swift, highly maneuverable and unpredictable crime fighting force.

At present, the scooter is the only police vehicle where the radio stays with the man. No matter where he moves away from the vehicle—on the upper floors of a tenement house, down a dark alley, or in wooded park terrain, assistance of his fellow officers is on the way by use of radio contact.

#### REACTION OF PUBLIC

As the reactions of the people we serve, the press and other news media, and the various police commanders began to jell, it seemed evident that the radio-equipped scooter patrol team was a dramatic and effective innovation in policing.

The personal effect on the neighborhood was noted. Public enthusiasm was evident at once. The Deputy Commissioner in charge of Community Relations commented: "The man in the radio car is just a fleeting profile seen through glass. The man on the scooter is not enclosed in an impersonal vehicle. He stops, he talks, he gets to know people."

An unofficial operational name for the scooter patrol was coined—THE SCRAMBLE PATROL—from the writer's Air Force experience. SCRAMBLE, an acronym for Scooters in Communication with Range And Mobility for Better Law Enforcement.

Recently, several momentous events required the utmost in police effort; namely, the visit of His Holiness the Pope, (October 4, 1965), the massive electrical power failure (November 9–10, 1965), and the paralyzing city-wide transit strike, (January 1–13, 1966). These events taxed the resources of the New York City Police Department to an unprecedented extent.

During the visit of Pope Paul VI, the scooter patrolmen were invaluable to commanding officers of sectors along a motorcade route lined with over a million persons. The scooter men served as reconnaissance scouts, inter-sector messengers, and as liaison officers when communications were severed or overtaxed.

During the electrical power failure, at the height of an evening rush hour, with several million persons stalled in transit, the Manhattan communications unit was blacked out for eight critical minutes. However, the scooter patrol maintained immediate, direct radio communication with precinct station houses. A portable radio transceiver was substituted for the base transmitter. One scooter was sent from Manhattan to Maspeth, Queens, over a jammed Williamsburg Bridge for emergency radio equipment, an impossible task for an auto. The scooter went and returned promptly.

In the city-wide transit strike, while public transportation was nonexistent, the scooters were in constant demand. They were able to cut through traffic blockages and quickly unlock vehicular congestion, even riding on sidewalks when necessary. Besides traffic and law enforcement duties, the scooter patrolman could quickly survey problem areas and report factually to precinct commanders and patrol supervisors. In the vicinity of bridges and tunnels, when traffic lanes were reversed to expedite the flow of vehicles from major road-way approaches, the scooter men were utilized most effectively. Also, they delivered messages and supplies through otherwise impassable locations.

#### ADVANTAGES

Some of the advantages we have found in our use of two-wheeled scooters are:

1. *Greatly Extended Patrol Coverage.* A foot patrolman on a scooter easily covers at least five times the territory he formerly could—and more efficiently. With the same available force, a department can expand protective patrol, particularly in the outlying or residential areas of the city, where it is difficult to provide adequate coverage by ordinary foot patrol.

2. *Better Police Observation.* In an auto, a patrolman generally must maintain minimum traffic speed. His view is partly obstructed within the car. The scooter patrolman has 360 degrees visibility, and he can proceed on the flank of traffic lanes as slowly as he desires.

3. *Ease of Movement in Congested Areas.* Police experience indicates that many emergencies become greater problems because of the inability or delay in getting men and equipment to the scene. The two-wheeled scooter is the ideal patrol vehicle to cut through traffic-clogged streets that block any three or four-wheeled vehicle. It can patrol dead end streets and cul-de-sacs where autos do not enter because of the difficulty of turning around. It is also valuable on marginal streets and parkway areas where patrol cars cannot penetrate.

4. *Freeing of Radio Patrol Cars for Constant Patrol.* Since the scooter handles many minor types of calls for assistance such as minor accidents, aided cases, and other routine duties, radio cars are freed for a more constant patrol and response to major incidents.

5. *Economy of Operation.* A scooter can be purchased for several hundred dollars. Gas mileage is high and maintenance proportionately low.

6. *Capability for Mobilization.* With radio communication, a potential for quick mobilization for any contingency can be realized. This cannot be accomplished with foot patrols.

7. *Reduction of Patrol Fatigue.* Constant foot patrol is fatiguing at best. Response to a distant emergency on foot leaves a patrolman winded and at a disadvantage. The aid of a motor scooter appreciably reduces this fatigue factor.

8. *Increased Morale and Stimulation of Recruitment.* The opportunity to ride as well as walk stimulates and quickens a man's job interest. The assignment of a scooter gives a foot patrolman more work and more responsibility. As a more active police officer, a greater sense of individual contribution to the police effort follows. Scooter patrol also appears to interest young men in the police service, thus increasing and stimulating recruitment.

9. *Preventative and Deterrent Effect.* This is felt to be the most salient feature of the scooter patrol. It is believed that a patrolman on foot often goes unseen or at least unnoticed, whereas a scooter, being both audible and visible, creates a comforting awareness of police presence in the public mind. It was thought, at first, that the noise of the scooter might be a source of annoyance. On the contrary, a considered disadvantage has now become a source of comfort and reassurance to the public—day or night—and an "audio-deterrent" to the potential malefactor.

10. *A New Respect by Juveniles.* A parked

scooter patrolman draws youngsters like a magnet. The attraction has led to a new opportunity for the patrolman to establish a rapport with the younger generation, which we hope will grow to adult respect as the youngsters mature, as well as an aid in recruiting. It is also worthwhile to note that the delinquent youngster, as well as the adult criminal, develops a new respect for the law not because of any affection for the man on the scooter, but simply because of his pursuit potential. No youngster can outrun a motor scooter.

11. *Inter-Precinct Support.* Spread to all areas of a city, precinct team units can provide a city-wide operating network of instantly available task forces.

12. *Budgetary Consensus.* When did a police administrator ever discover such a unanimous eagerness throughout a city to purchase a large amount of new police equipment?

13. *Operational Experience.* The two-wheeled scooter can be operated safely if there is proper selection, screening, and training of manpower. That the scooter must be used as a slow moving protective patrol device and not as a high speed pursuit vehicle must be inculcated in the minds of the patrolmen.

A minimum of training is required. We have found that three days of training suffices. Injuries have all been minor and generally seem to occur, shortly after an initial period of caution, due to over-enthusiasm and over-confidence which may lead to "cowboying." Our first experience was in the rough and hilly terrain of our city park system. City streets are more compatible with smooth and safe operation. A training program of at least three days and emphasis on conservatism on patrol have negated the injury factor.

The training program consists of a half-day at the Police Academy for eye and reaction tests and safety instruction. Three days of operational and field training follow.

14. *Inclement Weather Experience.* The often expressed disadvantage of a two-wheeled scooter operation because of inclement weather has been disproved by this winter's experience. Little time is lost because of inclement weather. The scooters can operate on wet ground, with caution. During heavy rain or snow, the scooters are placed out of service. Nothing is lost, really, for two reasons: crime decreases in the streets in proportion to the inclemency of the weather, and the scooter patrolmen still patrol—on foot.

Cold weather has not caused any great degree

of physical discomfort. Modern, warmth-without-weight-type uniforms suitable for both foot and scooter operation enable the scooter patrolman to function in cold weather.

*Plans for Expansion.* The police commissioner has directed preparation of a supplementary budget request to include approximately 700 scooters for patrol in all precincts in the city in the 1966-67 fiscal year budget. It is believed that, rather than saddle the taxpayers of the city with an ever increasing financial burden of larger personnel quotas, the job of the police may be done better through the use of mobile, flexible, inexpensive equipment to expand a police officer's range of public protection.

#### THE POTENTIAL OF SCOOTER PATROL

1. *Crime Reduction.* In the opinion of the writer, when all 79 New York City police precincts have scooter team-units similar to the 7th Precinct unit, street crime will decrease very significantly. The unique, flexible patrol possible with scooters should materially reduce the opportunities for street crimes to be committed.

2. *Traffic.* Beyond its direct value to police in traffic problems, the scooter indirectly benefits the entire city. Business loses less time and money in traffic and delivery delays. The public rides more quickly to and from work. Countless other benefits will accrue from a scooter-radio, tow-truck team in traffic alleviation, throughout the entire city.

3. *Public Relations.* As the scooter patrol wends its way through the residential and business areas of New York City, a resurgence of public confidence will take place. The scooter patrolman can answer today's plaintive cry: "Where is the former neighborhood cop on the beat? He was always around when we needed him."

This readily seen personal presence may lead to a fostering of a new and better police image of a helpful and interested "neighborhood cop." This could do much to allay current anxieties of many citizens. In the writer's judgment, a respected *neighborhood policeman* has little worry over charges of "overpolicing."

4. *Manpower Conservation.* Not only does the scooter patrol avoid the need for more personnel, it may, in fact, reduce manpower requirements. Particularly at parades, public events, and demonstrations, planned police deployment often re-

quires a time-safety margin, and a manpower-safety margin for potential or unexpected trouble to insure early and sufficient personnel. A scooter "task force" available and quickly mobilized can reduce both of these safety margins.

5. *One-Man—Two-Man Car Controversy.* The advocates for and against two-man car operation have been in controversy for many years. There is undoubtedly much to be said for each side. However, one of the most potent arguments against the one-man car—that of lessened protection and increased danger to the solo operator—can be further diluted. Advocates of one-man car patrol admit this danger factor exists and theoretically cancel it out by doubling the number of cars on patrol. This is reasoned to reduce patrol territory and so place the former partner in another car which will be closer in time of need and quicker to arrive. But the question is—how quick is quick? A radio car only two blocks away can be trapped in traffic—little help or solace to a policeman in trouble. The scooter, however, can guarantee immediate assistance.

#### THE HUMAN FACTOR

During the years in which the motor scooter program was formulated and developed, the writer encountered some resistance to the change of patrol concept involved. Change is always difficult but, as the program progressed, resistance diminished.

However, one intangible factor proved to be most important for the success of the program—the human factor. It gave a double impetus to the use of motor scooters in police work.

On one hand, the public helped our success because it perceived better protection and law enforcement at a lower cost.

On the other hand, the new morale and enthusiasm generated among our patrolmen by their new item of equipment, the scooter, helped to create a better, more mobile police patrol able to offer more protection for more people in more territory.

For the cost of ten policemen for one year, the city can buy about 300 scooters. The anti-crime value of the 300 scooters weighed against the negligible effect of adding ten patrolmen to a 28,000 man force tipped the scale decidedly in favor of the scooters.