

The Big 'E', and I don't mean Elvis!

By Andy Norrie



Captain Travis Yates of the Tulsa Police Department in Oklahoma is a person I hold in high regard for his work championing a reduction in the number of police line-of-duty deaths. He is the creator of www.policedriving.com, the current serving President of the Association of Law Enforcement Emergency Response Trainers (ALERT www.alertinternational.com) and he is a driving force behind the 'Below 100 Initiative' (<http://below100.com>).

Captain Yates is one of those people who can spur someone to action with a pointed question or an inspirational conversation. So, because of him, I have written: The Big 'E', and I don't mean Elvis!

I dedicate this article to the memory of the 63 police motorcycle officers who have given their lives in the line of duty in the past ten years. Let us learn from them, so that their deaths were not in vain.

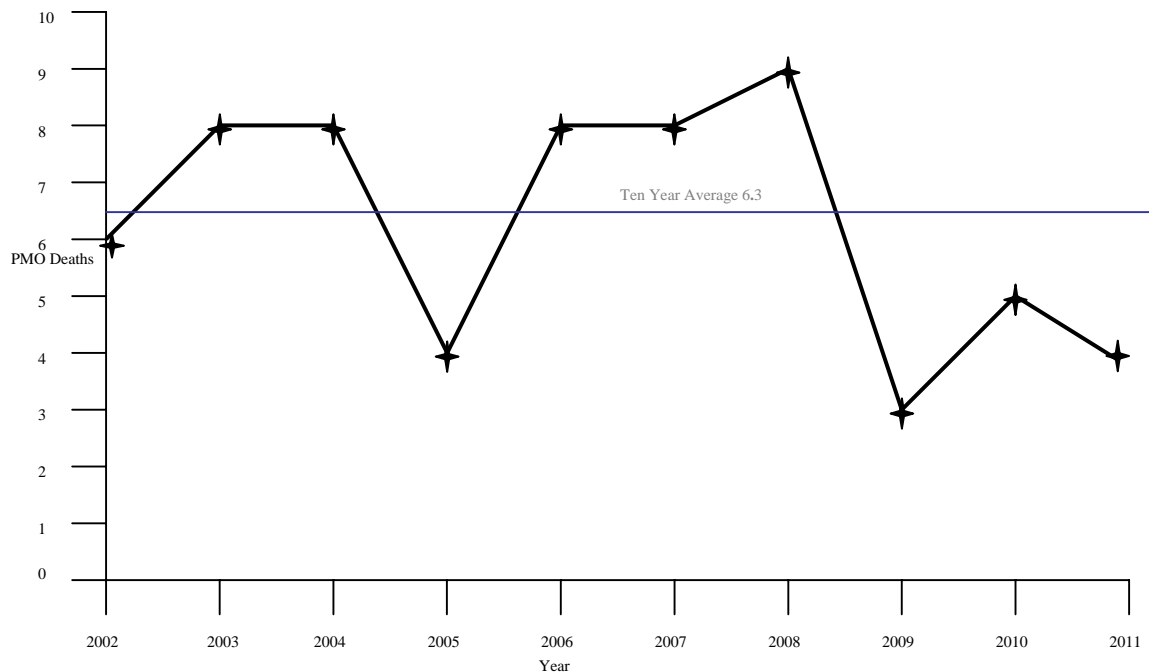
The Big E, I refer to is 'Escorts'. There are many different kinds of escorts and varying motivations for doing them. Some are legitimate and required by law, and others are the result of political, historical or other influences that motivate them. Unequivocally, I believe escorts are the most dangerous type of riding

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police motorcycle officers can engage in. I provide the following data and facts to support this statement and to identify an alarming trend.

First, the good news! Data from the Officer Down Memorial Page (www.odmp.org) was used to create the following graph that shows police motorcycle officer (PMO) deaths for the past ten years (2002 to 2011). The black line represents the total PMO deaths during that period. As you can see by the blue line, the ten year average is 6.3 PMO deaths per year. One PMO death is too many, but we can see a positive trend downward from the average has occurred in the last several years.

10 year snapshot of Police Motorcycle Officer deaths



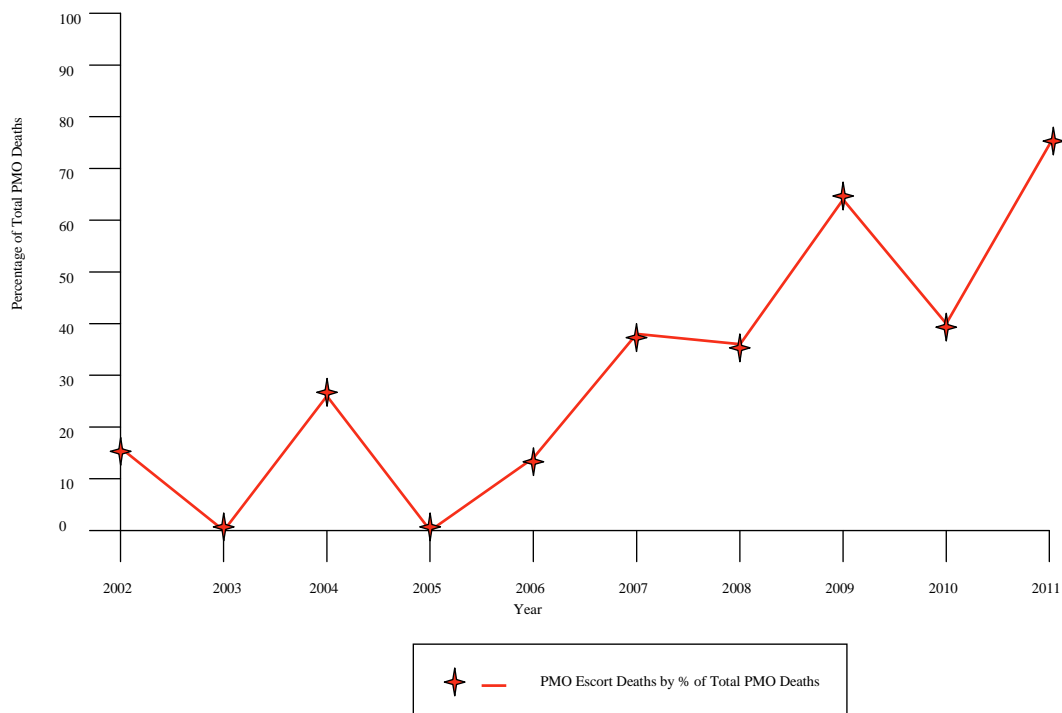
★ — Total PMO Deaths

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Now for the bad news! The following graph shows PMO deaths due to involvement in escorts as a percentage of total PMO deaths. As you can see there is an alarming and disturbing trend upward in the percentage of PMO escort-related deaths, peaking at 75% in 2011.

This graph should send shivers down your spine!

10 year snapshot of Police Motorcycle Officer escort-related deaths as a percentage of total Police Motorcycle Officer deaths



Now that we have the cold hard facts, let us get on with addressing the issue. I am not anti-escorts, in fact, I absolutely believe motorcycles are the right platform for providing escort duty when the escort is valid, warranted and conducted by highly trained and skilled police motorcycle officers. I do however, believe it is time for some healthy, constructive and open discussion on this issue to improve and help in our quest for excellence in the police motorcycle profession.

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One hundred and sixty-six countries are signatories to the 1973 United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Crimes against Internationally Protected Persons (IPPs), including Diplomatic Agents. This Convention provides an obligation on host countries to protect Heads of State and diplomats from attack at official premises, their private accommodation or their 'means of transport'. Sites and locations can be secured and hardened to protect the dignitary. History and experience have shown us that the most vulnerable time for a dignitary is during their transportation. And so, much personnel and financial resources are invested in securely transporting these IPPs.

There are safety escorts. These escorts provide safe passage for the individual, group or item for the greater good of the community including the participants. Many jurisdictions have a legislative requirement for escorts that fit these criteria. An example of this in my jurisdiction is oversize loads. Due to the potential danger to the public by the movement of large and dangerous loads the carrier must acquire a permit (that restricts times, routes, etc) and mandates the requirement of a police escort.

There are historic, convenience and vanity escorts. Due to historic patterns and various business models it has become possible in some jurisdictions to buy or procure an escort because you want one. Funerals, celebrities or people of influence hire police to ensure them or their group, get to where they are going on time and together.

I would now like to approach escorts from a risk management perspective.

Risk management leaders like renowned California Highway Patrol Captain(retired) Gordon Graham focus on pre-incident prevention of problems using a philosophy of: "Prevention is better than Correction". To apply this philosophy to police motorcycle operations we must evaluate our job function using a Risk/Frequency Analysis. We must analyze and assign all aspects of our job function into one of the following four categories:

- 1 Low Risk – Low Frequency
- 2 Low Risk – High Frequency
- 3 High Risk – High Frequency
- 4 High Risk – Low Frequency

History and research show us that if we have good people, policies, training, supervision and discipline we will have success in categories 1, 2 and 3.

A good police motorcycle program will have success if it contains:

- *Good People* – A relevant selection process that identifies people with solid character traits.
- *Good Policies* – Established, reasonable and communicated parameters and standards expected of your officers.
- *Good Training* – Sound initial basic instruction and ongoing, progressive training periods.

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- *Good Supervision* – Well-rounded, knowledgeable supervisors who are going to keep the group on track and provide the tools and an environment for success.
- *Good Discipline* – Fair, impartial enforcement of rules with a clearly defined delineation between what is acceptable and what is not acceptable conduct.

If you have a weakness in any of these foundational areas you are exposing yourself and your organization to preventable risk and the odds will eventually catch up to you. If all of these aspects of your program are solid then your vulnerability to risk lies mainly in the portions of your job that fall into category 4 and are identifiable as High Risk – Low Frequency. I believe motorcycle escorts fall into this fourth category!

Are motorcycles the right platform for providing escort duty? Absolutely they are, for certain types of escorts. Due to the motorcycle's small physical footprint and its manoeuvrability, the rider can negotiate through the traffic and get to the intersection, take control of it and clear the roadway before the arrival of the motorcade. In congested urban areas the police motorcycle (utilized by a highly skilled and proficient rider) is the best tool for the job. However, all the reasons that the motorcycle is the best tool for escorts are all the same reasons that the motorcycle and its rider are exposed to extreme risk doing escorts. Minimal conspicuity, inattentional blindness and limited safety systems expose the escorting officer to heightened risks.

There is no greater responsibility than safety, and we need to constantly review and scrutinize how we conduct ourselves in identified risk areas. I believe that it is time that police agencies take a hard look at why and how we provide escorts and make some risk versus reward determinations. It is time for some frank resolve to establish a legitimate threshold of whom and what deserves a police escort so we can minimize risks for our officers and our organizations. Procedures and policies need to be established and enforced to ensure safety. There are alternative options and strategies available for those areas that do not meet the threshold. For those areas that do meet the threshold, we must conduct the escorts as safely and responsibly as possible.

If we are going to put our motor officers in harm's way, we ethically, morally and legally have a duty to prepare them to be effective at the task. Riding on escort duty is the pushing the envelope of risk. We must train and equip our officers for these risky events. Only our best of the best can, and should be doing them. These officers should be trained to the highest standards, be tested to these standards regularly, and be held to strict procedures or guidelines. That's what we do for other high risk – low frequency tasks in policing like SWAT and Police Divers. The motor officer's qualification and activities must be contingent on the fact that every motor officer involved has regularly demonstrated a proficiency

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level necessary to function safely during escorts. Their equipment should be the best available and maintained to the highest standards.

I challenge all my fellow motor officers to consider this information and then do one thing to make our profession safer. I can give you 63 reasons why you should!

Andy Norrie is a Staff Sergeant with the Toronto Police Service in Toronto, Canada. He has been a member of the Department for the past 28 years and has over 25 years of experience on police motorcycle duty. Andy is an instructor for the Canadian Harley-Davidson Police Motorcycle Training Program. He has attended and participated in various police motorcycle training and competition events throughout North America and is one of the founders of the Great Lakes Police Motorcycle Training Seminar based in and around the province of Ontario, Canada. For more information or to contact the author you can e-mail him at: andy.norrie@torontopolice.on.ca

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