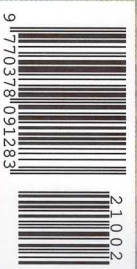


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Words : Quinton van Eeden

# THINK BIKE

## GIVING BACK TO BIKING



[I'm always ready to acknowledge those among us who give of their time freely to help others. I've been aware of the ThinkBike initiative for many years but never really understood how it worked. So, when Quinton van Eeden reached out to me and asked if I would like an article explaining ThinkBike, the work they do and the volunteers who do it, it was the perfect opportunity to learn more about this body of men and women who do so much to make motorcycling safer for all of us. Ed]

**I**mages of high-viz gear, disciplined formation riding, courteously acknowledging other bikers (including fist-bumping the delivery guy on the scooter next to you at the traffic light), directing traffic at intersections during events and thanking cagers for their patience, do not exactly fit the popular image of "hairy-arsed bikers".

While probably best known for the ThinkBike stickers pasted on the back bumpers of countless

vehicles or seeing the ThinkBike Marshals escorting cyclists and runners during mass-participation events such as 702 Walk the Talk, the 947 Ride Joburg, the KFM Gun Run and the international Hotchillee Cape Rouleur cycle race, it is the ThinkBike Road Safety Campaign that is the reason why ThinkBike Marshals exist.

The ThinkBike Road Safety Campaign has been running since 2006 and is aimed at increasing the awareness of motorcycle

safety and promoting responsible motorcycling as a lifestyle. The road safety campaign is managed by the Motorcycle Safety Institute on behalf of ThinkBike Marshals who self-fund and support the campaign by providing marshalling services to cycling, running and bike events.

According to the authoritative Union Cycliste Internationale Guide to Road Events "... motorcycle marshals are a key element in the success of a cycling event - any organiser taking the safety of everyone with the necessary seriousness and care, must be able to rely on competent and experienced marshals." And while not for a moment attempting a comparison to the fantastic response of the F1 Medical Team and the marshals who pulled Roman Grosjean out of the fire at the recent Bahrain GP, ThinkBike Marshals would like to believe that their extensive training and pre-event planning enable them to react efficiently and effectively to emergency situations. The Grosjean incident proves why event organisers should insist on using trained and experienced marshals.

To ensure that ThinkBike Marshals are the effective and efficient "eyes, ears and hands" of the event organiser out on the road, ThinkBike does extensive pre-event route planning in conjunction with event organisers including a full



route recce to identify resource requirements and any safety or traffic conflict concerns. Think Bike Marshals have carefully cultivated and enhanced a number of core competencies which cumulatively make them the primary motorcycle marshalling body in the country – easily on par with overseas groups such as the British Cycling National Escort Group. In the words of Harry McCallum – the International Safety Officer for Solar Car Racing and previous commanding officer of the NSW Police Escort detachment – “most, if not all, of the Think Bike marshals can put on the uniform and fit in straight-away with our guys in the police escort group.” High praise indeed from someone who has overseen event safety and marshalling world-wide for most of his professional life!

These words were given even greater substance when Think Bike Marshals won the Best Team Professionalism and Safety Award during the 2018 Sasol Solar Challenge – an award usually reserved for the participating teams.

As “no plan survives first contact”, ThinkBike Marshals use a command-and-control grid deployment system and a bespoke communications network during an event to quickly respond to any emergencies allowing them to rapidly re-deploy marshals to respond to changing

circumstances and maintain the overall situational awareness picture for event organiser. If this sounds vaguely familiar from your Army days, you’d be right as this is the level of discipline and training required to ensure the safety of all event participants.

“We don’t take ourselves too seriously – but we take what we do very seriously” and this starts with the simple discipline of being properly turned out in appropriate rider gear, with a road-worthy bike and parking in a proper “right-dress” formation. This gets the marshals into the appropriate frame of mind when they assemble for an event so that they can get their “game-faces on and bring their A-game” – because peoples’ safety depends on what we do out on the road.

In both the Western Cape and Gauteng, ThinkBike Marshals currently have more than 70 volunteer marshals, all who have been riding since an early age and with more than 400 years shared marshalling experience between them. They are not simply a group of old, grey fogies who secretly harbour a desire to be traffic cops – they come from a variety of backgrounds with most running their own businesses, several holding post-graduate academic qualifications, and all sharing a passion for motorcycling. They are

volunteers using their own bikes, buying their own kit, giving their time and resources to promote responsible motorcycling in South Africa. Several ThinkBike marshals are members of patch clubs and have completed the Road Captain training offered by the clubs to ensure that the ThinkBike marshals interact and operate seamlessly with the patch club officials when they both are looking after the safety of bikers during mass-ride events such as the annual Bikers Toy Run.

The essential, and non-negotiable competency which any motorcycle marshal must have, is the ability to ride a motorcycle competently and safely in difficult circumstances, sometimes in very close proximity to event participants, traffic and within narrow confines – more often than not at widely varying speeds while at the same time maintaining full situational awareness of traffic movements, anticipating and actively mitigating potential danger situations.

Think Bike Marshals therefore constantly undergo specialised rider skills training with expert instructors such as MSI and ADA and continuously practice these skills, in keeping with Covey’s 7th habit of “sharpening the saw”, by marshalling at least 1-2 events/rides per month, every month. This not only gives marshals the necessary





saddle time to enhance their riding skills and team work, but also adds to their experience by exposing them individually and as a team to various road traffic situations which marshals are required to resolve using their own initiative within the parameters of the standard operating protocols set out by Think Bike Marshals.

This emphasis on ongoing training and experience, has led to a number of Think Bike marshals achieving the MSI Skilled Rider and Road Captain accreditations with some also being certified by the UCI as Event Regulators i.e., they are qualified to marshal international cycling competitions such as the Tour de France.

Without exception, marshals will tell you that ThinkBike Marshals is their way of "giving back to biking" for all the years of motorcycling pleasure they've enjoyed, and they provide free marshalling services to charity organisations such as Meals on Wheels, Poppy Run, the Childhood Cancer Foundation South Africa and Cancervive.

Overseas research shows that if a mere 10% switch from cars to bikes, it could decrease traffic congestion by as much as 40% - given that we

can lane-split whereas cars are stuck in their lanes. To help encourage responsible motorcycling as a lifestyle, ThinkBike Marshals offer ride-along opportunities whereby a newbie to the biking community can join an experienced marshal on a leisurely ride-out during which the marshal will observe the riders' skill and offer constructive advice and riding tips over a cup of coffee. Some marshals also have cameras fitted to their bikes and along with the friendly chat, this allows a fellow biker to help a newbie to become a more confident and skilled rider in the spirit of the brother- and sisterhood that we all share. ThinkBike Marshals are currently busy putting together more new rider opportunities such as gymkhanas and slow races where the emphasis is on slow riding and bike handling skills - to make advanced riding skills such as slow speed bike control, feet-up balance, full-lock U-turns, emergency- and trail braking second nature for new riders. By the very nature of their marshalling duties, the ThinkBike marshals must be highly skilled and proficient at bike handling skills and the general road safety benefits of the managed transition from slow speed skills to high-speed expert bike handling, is well documented.

South Africa is an absolute paradise for motorcycling and our general lack of public transport, increasing traffic congestion in the metros, great distances, and our inborn wanderlust, make motorcycling a no-brainer as a lifestyle - a vision that ThinkBike Marshals gladly support and foster.

Joining the ThinkBike Marshals is by invite-only - an accredited marshal has to invite a fellow biker to join and then mentor him until he is accredited after being a trainee for at least a year while demonstrating competence in skills such as advanced level bike control, formation riding, intersection and traffic control and conflict management.

If you'd like to know more about ThinkBike Marshals, becoming a marshal or their motorcycling marshalling services, contact them at <https://thinkbike.co.za/marshalling/> to help promote responsible motorcycling as the preferred passion and lifestyle we all share.

