

RETS Curriculum Development – a Historical Perspective

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Overview

The Motorcycle Safety Foundation embarked on a significant renewal endeavor late in the 1990s to update and improve its curricula and instructor certification programs and processes.

Developed over a period of several years and continually analyzed, improved and expanded, the MSF Rider Education and Training SystemSM (MSF RETS) uses contemporary, proven approaches to promote the safety of motorcyclists and enhance their enjoyment of the riding experience.

The Motorcycle Safety Foundation's systems approach to curriculum design is underscored by the concept of safety renewal – that a rider should be exposed to multiple, lifelong learning experiences about safe riding techniques and personal responsibility.

The new RETS does just that; offering more training opportunities for more motorcyclists at more skill and experience levels than ever before. With stand-alone yet inter-related courses and modules, RETS' foundation consists of research-based, field-tested curricula developed by experts in diverse disciplines, certified RiderCoaches and RiderCoach Trainers, professional development support, and quality assurance programs.

Consisting of more than 30 courses total, the 2009 RETS curriculum catalog includes 16 existing courses, 11 courses to be released in 2009, and a number of courses still under development for release in subsequent years.

RETS will keep evolving as the MSF continues to focus on developing, maintaining, and improving research-based curricula of the highest quality that best meets the safety-related needs and interests of the motorcycling community.

This section examines the MSF's curriculum development process from a historical perspective, and also touches on the key underpinnings of RETS; the safety doctrines, behavioral theories, and learning principles and practices that guided the systems-approach design of this landmark training program.

The Development Process – a Historical Perspective

It's been quite a journey. Having single course offerings for beginning and more experienced riders has evolved into today's RETS, the most comprehensive, systems-based approach to motorcycle safety training curricula ever conceived and implemented.

Well, how did we get here? First, let's take a look at the MSF's early days.

The Motorcycle Safety Foundation was established in 1973 to develop programs and services to enhance motorcyclist safety. Releasing its first learn-to-ride curriculum in 1974, called the Beginning Rider Course, MSF established a pattern of continuous research and renewal that includes a broad range of products and services to enhance motorcycle safety in the United States.

In 1976, MSF released the extensively researched and field-tested Motorcycle Rider Course (MRC). It became the standard by which public and private entities offered motorcycle safety training. In 1979 the Chief Instructor certification program was implemented to become the train-the-trainer mechanism to expand and develop a corps of Instructors around the nation. In 1980, MSF released its first formal curriculum for the experienced rider, the Better Biking Program. Then in 1986, MSF released its updated learn-to-ride curriculum called the Motorcycle *RiderCourse: Riding and Street Skills*. It incorporated many of the findings from the Hurt Study and focused on motorcycle-specific collision avoidance skills.

MSF celebrated its 20th anniversary in 1993 and reached a major milestone: the training of one million riders using MSF curriculum.

A Curriculum Development Team was formed in March of 1996. Its charge was to develop and facilitate program planning for a revised edition of the MRC:RSS; to collaborate with the MSF/SMSA Curriculum Advisory Committee; and to determine the development and design parameters for a new MRC:RSS. The Curriculum Development Team's goals included determining what the development process should be and what the new curriculum should look like. The Curriculum Development Team's efforts concluded with a 12-page report and also a stalemate; some felt the best course of action was to start with an entirely blank page; others wanted to "edit" the MRC:RSS and keep the "best of the best,"; and finally, SMSA representatives favored continuing the MRC:RSS "as is" with no revisions.

The Development Process Intensifies – RETSDOT

It was an intensive, team-based development process in the late nineties that ultimately steered rider education into the 21st century with the

introduction of the Rider Education Training System (RETS) and the new Basic *RiderCourse* (BRC).

In April of 1998, the first team meeting was held for what has become known as RETSDOT, the Rider Education and Training System Development and Oversight Team. RETSDOT included individuals from within and without the motorcycle rider training community – all unquestioned experts in their respective fields. This unique mixture of invested (within the motorcycling community) and divested (those outside the motorcycling community) expertise ensured that a multitude of perspectives, both macro and micro, would be considered. RETSDOT members were culled from these disciplines:

- Policy and Program Administration
- MSF Oversight
- Instructional Systems Design
- Evaluation and Performance Measurement
- Traffic Safety Education
- Motorcycle Safety and Rider Education
- MSF curriculum and certification operations
- Research and Evaluation
- Organizational Communication
- Communication and Facilitation

A specially trained facilitator was also engaged to guide the work and progress of the team. RETSDOT met several dozen times over a three-and-a-half year period. All told, the group spent hundreds of hours together, and countless more outside of the meetings, working on individual areas of research and responsibility.

One of the group's primary undertakings was an exhaustive review and assessment of existing motorcycle safety-training curricula and research findings, including:

- Curriculum specifications for prior as well current MSF curricula (original BRC, MRC, MRC:RSS, BBP, and ERC)
- Research including Task Analysis, Photographic Analysis, the Hurt Study, and the Colorado Feasibility Study
- Findings of the 1996 Curriculum Development Team
- Joint SMSA/MSF MRC/RSS Enrollment Questionnaire (1998)
- SMSA Curriculum Advisory Committee (1998)
- MSF / ASU Study (1998)
- MSF Stakeholder Focus Group Research (1998)
- MSF Student Focus Group Research (1998)

All-in-all, this process yielded 147 recommendations for an improved curriculum in the following categories:

Developmental Considerations	10
Administrative Considerations	15
Curriculum in General	27
Classroom	42
Range	<u>53</u>
Total Recommendations	147

Originally it was thought that a revised learn-to-ride course curriculum would emerge as the final product of this group. However, RETSDOT concluded that although the curriculum content as it was taught was sound and effective, a more comprehensive education and training system would be required to meet current and future motorcycle safety rider education and training needs and interests.

The goals of the new MSF curriculum system as developed through the RETSDOT process are to provide lifelong learning and skills development, offer multiple entry points for riders at various skill/experience levels, accommodate graduated licensing or other licensing needs, and empower training providers to educate riders for a lifetime of motorcycling enjoyment.

The MSF released its new learn-to-ride curriculum, the *Basic RiderCourse* (BRC), in 2001. With over three and one-half years of development and testing, the BRC was designed as, and has proven to be, a modern and effective learn-to-ride program and a significant improvement over prior curricula. A national survey of RiderCoaches in 2005 showed an overall approval rating of 83% for *Basic RiderCourse* range and classroom effectiveness and 87% found the BRC the same or more satisfying to conduct than the former curriculum. Nearly 2 million riders have been trained with the new *Basic RiderCourse* since its introduction in 2001.

In 2003, the ERC *RiderCourse* Suite was introduced, followed by Scooter School 1 in 2004.

“Intersection,” a public education and awareness program for car drivers and other motorists as part of the “Host-an-Event” series, was introduced in 2007, followed by the Military *SportBike RiderCourse* in 2008.

Another nine RETS courses are in final development stages and expected to be introduced in 2009, including Two-Hour Introduction to Motorcycle Riding, Four-Hour Introduction to Motorcycling, Street *RiderCourse* 1, 3-Wheel *Basic RiderCourse*, Scooter *Basic RiderCourse*, Returning *RiderCourse*, Advanced *RiderCourse*—*SportBike* Techniques (civilian version of Military *SportBike RiderCourse*), Street *RiderCourse* 2, and Street Smart—*Rider Perception*.

Since 1974, more than 4.5 million students have graduated from MSF *RiderCourses*.

RETS Curriculum Development – Underpinnings

What are the driving forces behind the BRC, ERC, and subsequent MSF curricular offerings introduced since 2001?

MSF adheres to a strict educational protocol for curricula development. It is an intellectually disciplined approach and one that involves input from a variety of experts, exhaustive research and field-testing, as well as continual process improvement.

The MSF Rider Education and Training System was conceptualized and developed by considering several fields of study and disciplines, which can be summarized within four key categories:

1) Research and Experience

Traffic safety and motorcycle safety research was reviewed that included crash studies and crash data and statistics, the Haddon Matrix of loss reduction which considers pre-, crash, and post-crash factors related to operator, machine and environments, and motorcycle training programs around the world specific to the development of motorcycle skills and techniques.

2) Safety and Risk Management Principles/Human Factors

A review of human factors research helped reveal principles related to the human functions of the motorcyclist task and considered rider culpability, personality factors, and risk-taking forces that motivate motorcyclists not just in overall risk taking but in making important decisions in moment-to-moment tasks. Visual perception, cognitive functions and motor skills aspects were important in considering how human factors could be addressed in a motorcycle safety education and training system.

3) Adult Learning and Development Principles

How people learn and develop was a primary consideration in designing a system that honors the contemporary theories and practices in learning.

The greatest shift had to do with accelerating the process of learning by changing the methodology from instructor-centered to learner-centered. Educational research has clearly demonstrated that information conveyed in a learner-centered, participatory environment, one that includes active involvement (versus an instructor-centered, lecture-styled one) supports better learning and retention of relevant concepts and information.

Adult learning principles - including theories and practices of brain-based learning, accelerated learning principles and learner-centered instructional techniques - were identified and incorporated

throughout RETS for both the classroom and range exercises, to provide the best opportunity possible for a class participant to acquire the skill set needed to learn how to ride and remain safe.

4) Motor Skills Development Principles

Key motor skill development principles include proper application of whole-to-part training, the distinguishing characteristics of kinesthetic and augmented feedback, and the effects of verbalization and visualization.

Just a few of the resulting applications of these principles that are incorporated into RETS: accuracy of skill is of greater important than speed during initial learning; that gross motor skills must be attended to first, followed by finer motor skills; and that over verbalization (on the part of the instructor) gets in the way of student learning.

Based on the latest research in motor skills development, riding exercises were restructured to build rider skills in a safer and more sequentially sound fashion. And emphasis was deepened in the areas of personal responsibility, self-assessment and risk management strategies.

In developing the new curricula, knowledge, skill, rider attitude, and rider behavior were all taken into account. Teaching students how to ride a motorcycle – the "what" to be taught – has not changed significantly. But the method of delivery – how the information is conveyed – now reflects the most contemporary research available on adult education and learning.

RETS Curriculum Development – Conclusion

MSF adheres to a strict educational protocol for curricula development. It is an intellectually disciplined approach, one that involves input from a variety of experts, exhaustive research and field-testing, as well as continual process improvement.

Our focus continues to be the development, maintenance, and improvement of the highest quality research-based curricula that best meets the safety-related needs and interests of the motorcycling community.

This process is complemented by the hard work of practitioners dedicated to delivering the best motorcycle training experience possible, helping riders and would-be riders to advance their skills and improve safety attitudes. With nine new training opportunities on the horizon for 2009, it promises to be a milestone year for RETS, for the motorcycle safety and

training community, and for motorcyclists and prospective motorcyclists all across the United States.

Since 1973, the Motorcycle Safety Foundation has set internationally recognized standards that promote the safety of motorcyclists with rider education courses, operator licensing tests, and public information programs. The MSF works with the federal government, state agencies, the military, and others to offer training for all skill levels so riders can enjoy a lifetime of safe, responsible motorcycling.

The MSF is a not-for-profit organization sponsored by BMW, BRP, Ducati, Harley-Davidson, Honda, Kawasaki, KTM, Piaggio, Suzuki, Triumph, Victory and Yamaha. For *RiderCourse*SM locations, call 800.446.9227 or visit www.msf-usa.org.