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Mini-bikes - Fun For Kids But Headache For Police, Officials

Spend an afternoon at a baseball or a football game at the Terrill Junior High School ball field and chances are you'll have trouble concentrating on the game or hearing yourself think at least once every five minutes. Off on the hill behind the junior high on property belonging to Public Service, along the route of the power lines, mini-bikes zoom back and forth at high speeds and with accompanying high noises.

There are times when it would appear that mini-bikes must be a legal and enjoyable method of transportation, if one judges by the number whizzing through the power line land by day and night. Legal they are . . . but very few users seem to be aware of the very stringent rules and regulations governing their usage. Riding mini-bikes requires licensing and inspection of both bike and driver.

As the small, motorized bikes grow in popularity, Scotch Plains Police Chief Joseph Powers points out that they are a distinct problem to police, since calls of complaint about unlicensed riders using unlicensed vehicles on public streets and highways is also on the upswing. "People think that because such bikes are for sale, they are automatically OK," said Powers. "Yes, they're OK on a farm or up in New Hampshire on some private trail, but they aren't legal without license plates and driver's license anywhere in this area," he continued.

The average mini-bike in use in Scotch Plains is not only unlicensed, but it probably couldn't be licensed, Powers claims, since very few would have the proper equipment to qualify for registration.

Nevertheless, users race the bikes up and down the power line property, in the Ashbrook Swamp area, and in Brookside Park along the Westfield-Scotch Plains border, to cite a few of the more prevalent areas of use. Powers wondered aloud whether parents were fully informed of the laws regarding the bikes.

Chief Joseph Gorsky points out that there are probably fewer abuses of the mini-bike licensing regulations in Fanwood because there are no large wooded areas for riders to use. However, his department does

receive occasional complaints from the power-line area, necessitating police attention. The Public Service frowns upon use of the property for private use, Gorsky said. He, too, questioned the indulgence of parents who allow children to own and use the bikes illegally.

Superintendent of Schools Fred J. Laberge joined the opponents. Terrill, Shackamaxon and Coles School are not mini-bike trails or tracks, he noted, yet there have already been a number of accidents attributable to their use on the grounds of these schools in particular. The school areas are used by other children playing, after school and on weekends, and there have been a couple of incidents of children being hurt by mini-bike riders. To date, none of the incidents have been serious, but parents have been upset. "The policy here, and the police are aware of it, is that anyone using a mini-bike illegally on school property is in violation of the law," Laberge said.

What are the licensing laws? According to Scotch Plains Detective Lieutenant Robert Luce, any motorized vehicle must meet state specifications. Included among the specifications are stop lights, tail lights, adequate brakes, etc. All such vehicles must be licensed by the state, which action requires inspection. Lots are homemade and would meet none of the requirements, Luce noted.

There is a surge in the popularity of trail bikes - these are motorized bicycles made and sold by reputable dealers and meeting Motor Vehicle department specifications for required equipment. They would probably pass state licensing requirements and plates could be obtained. Still, in order to operate them on public roadways, the driver must also be licensed. The driver must be 17, and pass the same state driving test required for operation of an automobile. Then, he must operate the bike in the proper manner and in the proper places. If a driver meets all these requirements, he can legally ride on public roads.

Luce cited the increasing awareness of insurance liability as a consideration for parents tempted to buy a child a mini-bike or a trail bike. The problem is that children sometimes convince parents to buy a bike, with a promise that the child will remain on his own driveway and in his own yard. Next thing you know, the bike and driver are shooting out into the streets and into the woods and power line areas in direct violation of the law, Luce concluded.

Monday Rains Produce Nervous Residents

It Was A Long Day For Police And Emergency Crews

There were many who watched the rainfall of October 29 with a dubious eye. The rains came and came and came. They set a record for the date. However, although the rainfall caused many a nervous moment, fortunately it didn't bring the destruction and headache which resulted from the August 2 rains. Within the Municipal Building, the rains and the weather forecast kept township employees on their toes watching developments carefully, and Township Manager Daniel Allen reported that what was originally planned as a routine meeting of department heads, set in advance for 3 p.m. on Monday afternoon, resulted instead in a "watchful waiting" session which provided township employees with a real experience in Civil Defense preparedness and flood-alert practice.

The department heads meeting had originally been called in order to discuss upcoming state exercises for Civil Defense. However, with rains coming down with an intensity, talk turned to more pressing immediate concerns, and a number of key employees were assigned to watch potential flood areas, brooks, etc. carefully. The township building was placed in a state of preparedness, and Allen requested that all employees plan to remain past the normal 4:30 closing time, since conditions and the weather forecast at 3 p.m. indicated that conditions would be aggravated to a point which would justify suspending normal working hours.

The flood warning system from Seeley's Pond was received by Scotch Plains, and the township in turn notified the communities of Plainfield and North Plainfield of the warning system alert. Allen also arranged for a message over WERA suggesting that any local residents with questions and/or problems resulting from the rainfall telephone the Civil Defense number.

The state of preparedness remained in effect from 3 to 5 p.m., as public employees continued their monitoring of brooks, prime flood areas, and weather forecasts. By 4:20 it stopped raining, and a decision was made to release employees, with a request that they remain on standby. Several administrative and clerical personnel remained on duty to man telephones in case of calls. Volunteers from the Civil Defense program joined the municipal employees on duty.

At the police department side of the house, Captain Michael Rossi reported that Monday's rain, while not causing extensive damage, nevertheless required the lengthiest stretch of flood-duty service ever for the men in the police department. He felt that this was because the rains never subsided for any noticeable period, and there was no respite to provide runoff on Route 22. That highway was

began to attack her. Powers said he saw the assailant repeatedly hitting the woman on the head.

Although disappointed at his confinement and his broken elbow, Powers said he is hopeful that his actions may have averted a worse experience for the woman.

Police Net Drug Cache

Scotch Plains police stopped a car which looked suspicious last weekend, and in a follow-up inspection, they netted a cache of drugs which had just been stolen from the Fanwood medical offices of Drs. Howard Lehr, Arnold Roth, and Todd Boff.

According to Scotch Plains police files, Officers Arthur Bruschetti and Joseph Protasiewicz were patrolling Route 22 by car early in the morning on October 22 when they noticed a car, containing five people, looking suspicious. They stopped the car and while questioning the occupants, noticed a black leather bag on the front seat. When they inspected the bag, they found 3,375 capsules and tablets with identifying markings from the Fanwood medical offices. The tablets and pills were mainly amphetamines.

The officers alerted the Fanwood police department and a check on the South Avenue building disclosed a breaking and entry through a basement window.

Arrested and charged with possession of stolen property and dangerous substances were Guy Gatti of 147 Sumner Avenue, Plainfield, William Brimmer of 610 Hanken Road, Bound Brook and Joseph B. Parzycki of 318 West Main Street, Bound Brook, and two juveniles.

The five were also charged with breaking and entry by the Fanwood police.

The Chief Aids Damsel In Distress

Going to the aid of a damsel in distress can result in a grateful damsel . . . but it can also result in a broken arm. Chief Joseph Powers is a case in point. On Saturday evening, October 27, Mr. and Mrs. Powers pulled into a parking space at Blue Star Shopping Center in Watchung. They heard screams for help, and spotted a nearby car with a young woman in the driver's seat. She was being beaten by a man and was doing the screaming.

Powers ran to the car, and the male attacker turned on the local police chief, swung at him and knocked him down. The attacker escaped. Powers is now out of commission with a broken arm, which is in a cast. He is hopeful that it will heal properly, but has been informed that it could require subsequent surgery if it doesn't heal.

Powers alerted the Watchung police, but the assailant escaped.

The young woman reported that he was seeking a ride to Bound Brook, and when she refused he

closed for the longest period Rossi could remember.

The first closing of the highway came at 2:50 p.m., when a patrol car with lights and flares blocked off the slow lane westbound at Route 22 and Victor Street. Then, at 4 p.m., the entire westbound highway, both lanes, had to be closed off and traffic detoured onto Mountain Avenue until about 5:00.

Rossi said the day shift was held over past their normal 4 p.m. release. The highway was reopened to traffic fully at 5:10 and, with rains ceasing, the police came back to headquarters to get dried off and prepare to go home. However, nature didn't cooperate, it poured again at 6 p.m., and the day shift was out again, blocking traffic westbound once more. At 9 p.m., the midnight shift was called out early, and assigned to Route 22, when it finally became necessary to stop traffic in both east and west bound lanes. Throughout all the previous detouring and blocking activity, large heavy-duty trucks were allowed to go through, since their size permitted them to get through the flood waters without getting stuck. However, Rossi said the situation was carefully watched, and by 9:30, it was apparent that the heavy trucks were now causing "waves" which washed into east-bound lanes, causing flooding there, so all traffic ceased at 10:00 p.m. By 11, with rains stopped, the eastbound lane was opened, and by 12:45 the westbound was also opened. Tired policemen eventually got home to dry out.

Allen commented that the day provided a good example of the organization which is possible when the township can assume an advance "preparedness" posture. This was possible on Monday because of advance awareness of pending weather conditions. In contrast, the August 2 floods incurred so quickly that the township departments were not able to assume the same degree of preparedness.

Notice!

The Scotch Plains Municipal Building will be closed on Election Day, Tuesday, November 6.

Listening Post

Both the Scotch Plains Township Listening Post and the Board of Education Listening Post will meet this Saturday.

To avoid conflict the Board of Education Listening Post is scheduled for 9 a.m. till 10 a.m. and the Township Listening Post from 10 a.m. till Noon.

For those anxious talkers who might like to really be heard, it is now possible to scurry to the Board Listening Post in the Choral Room at the High School and then on to the Township forum in the Council Chambers.