

# On The Level

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# To Protect and Serve... on Two Wheels

Police Departments Update Fleets to BMW

Tamela Rich · RA 40500

Photography by Mary Gilke, Tony Brown and Bob's BMW





# INTERVIEW

What kind of business owner spends 10-15 times the effort selling a product that generates one-third less profit than the others in the store? Meet Bob Henig of Bob's BMW, whose product — “authority motorcycles” fits that description.

Since 2002, Bob's has sold 92 motorcycles to ten police departments. “I have the sneaking suspicion that before 2002 we also sold a small number of R 1100 RT-Ps and before that a handful of K75 RT-Ps,” he adds, “but after a time data gets purged.”

You might think 92 motorcycles isn't a lot in twenty years until Bob starts explaining what's involved. Spoiler alert, it's often a long process with a mountain of paperwork at each step. He's pursued this line of business with law enforcement agencies since 1996, but why?

“It's a fascinating world and it's opened up a whole new community of good customers to us. It's also opened up a whole new way for us to give back to our community—by equipping officers with the best motorcycles for the job.”



## Get the officers in the saddle

Since selling BMWs into an existing fleet usually means displacing Harley-Davidson models, Bob likes getting all of the motorcycle officers out on a nearby training facility (basically a race track), loaded down with everything they carry in the line of duty—including their sidearms. “I want them going 115 miles an hour with sirens blaring, jumping over curbs, and making quick stops—everything they could possibly imagine putting their bikes through on the job. We let them prove to themselves that BMW is a superior product.”

Most of these bikes are sold within a 75-mile radius of the dealership in Jessup, Maryland. Why 75 miles? Agencies tend to offer invitations for bids to dealers close enough to meet service needs expeditiously. One exception is the Delaware State Police, which lacks a BMW dealership and instead selected Bob's BMW from four possible choices in neighboring Maryland and Pennsylvania.

## Every bike, a custom build

The fun starts when the bikes are delivered to Bob's. The service department builds each to departmental specs, usually adding sirens, lights, a note pad holder, gun racks, communications equipment, LiDAR, side stand pad, and driving lights. Internal saddlebag lighting can be installed, along with AR15-style gun racks, computers, and ticket printers. Then, there's the color combinations. BMW offers six standard colors, but Bob works with a local body shop if a department wants custom colors.

An average bike build, from uncrating to washing and waxing, requires 8-10 hours and comes in with a finished weight of about 700 pounds. According to Bob, most police departments apply their own decals, logos, insignia, and even

Top: Funeral procession with Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Police Department's motor unit

Middle photos: Three officers picking up their bikes after being serviced at the dealership

Bottom: Three MPDC motor officers with their bikes

Far left inset: A vintage photo showing BMW's long history of police authority motorcycles. What many BMW Police bikes looked like around the world in the 1950's and 1960's.

Preceding pages: Inauguration parade of President-elect Joe Biden January 20, 2021





Maryland State Police Service Loaner, a Camhead R 1200 RT-P

officer names on their end as they don't want those decals to be in the wrong hands. "Homeland Security, on the other hand, has requested that we do the installation," he adds, "and they will provide the re-sized decals, etc."

### Flying the flags for a new president

All of which brings us to the January 2021 inauguration of President Joe Biden, attended by the District of Columbia Metropolitan Police Department. Long before the inauguration Bob had been talking to the department about replacing some of the 60-65 Harley-Davidsons in their fleet, one of the largest east of the Mississippi. Bob thought he might get an order for as many as a dozen bikes and was very excited about that. Then he got a phone call saying the department didn't want a dozen bikes, they wanted 30! This windfall was thanks to the inauguration budget, which covered about half of the purchase price.

But wait, there's more! Before the requisition process concluded, the department increased the order to 33. Now, recall what's involved with building each bike (8-10 hours each). That means 33 bikes would take a good month to build. No problem, right? Well for added pressure, the contract required taking delivery a minimum of 30 days before the inauguration so the officers could learn them inside and out.

Not only that, but the contract also stipulated that seven of the bikes be fitted to carry a six-to-seven-foot pole with a six-foot flag that could travel at 8 mph.

Looking at photos from prior inaugurations, Bob quickly realized that he would have to engineer something different from what had been used with the Harley-Davidsons. On them, the flags were mounted to the front forks, which was not only unstable for the bikes, but unsafe for the officers, whose faces could be obscured by the flags themselves if the wind blew the wrong way (or if there wasn't enough of it).

You couldn't blame Bob for feeling like a dog who finally caught the bumper of the car he'd been chasing for years. He jumped into action, renting a warehouse across from the dealership (33 R 1250 RT-P models take a lot of space). Working with a fabricator he's used for years, Bob designed a new mount that would fly the flags in the back and could be ridden at speed. The project plan also included time for custom paint and called for building a bike a day.

Bob decided he would deliver all 33 completed bikes with qualified riders (many of whom retired police officers) over a couple of days instead of trailering. The 20-mile trips from Jessup to DC became the bikes' maiden voyage of sorts, and all the riders wore electric gear. "I'm pleased to say each one was delivered in perfect mechanical and cosmetic condition. Not a glitch."

### After sale service options

About those service needs, BMW offers a three-year or 60,000-mile warranty to law enforcement agencies because they typically put about 20,000 miles on each bike each year and replace them in three or four. On special request during the bid process, BMW will train a department technician at BMW Body and Paint STEP program Level 1, but even then, all warranty and electronic work is done by the dealership. Bob prefers doing all the service work for his clients, so that local municipalities don't put snowplow and brush hog mechanics to work on them.

But Bob doesn't stop with warranty work. The Maryland State Police (MSP) requested a special program after observing the consumer demo program at the dealership. MSP leaves a licensed demo bike at the dealership in case a quick changeover is needed, and Bob stores it for free. When a switch is necessary, his team can swap contents of the saddlebags, disconnect the computer, and finish the pre-ride safety inspection in five minutes. "It gives me goosebumps thinking about this. I'd love for all of our agencies to use the demo bike system."

For agencies without a demo at the dealership, the service team moves heaven, earth, and sometimes retail customers



## About the bikes

Top row: The flag holder itself is stainless steel, while the flag pole and flag pole receiver are aluminum. The holder attaches to the frame and the saddlebag mount as well. The mounting bracket only weighs about 3 lbs. The old Harley-Davidson fleet's flags were mounted to the front forks (unstable, and unsafe for operators). Bob said, "We can do this better. We'll attach them to the back and they'll be able to operate them at speed. "The mounts were officially tested at 30 mpg but can be safely ridden at speeds of up to 50 mph.

Middle photo: Delaware State Police getting a two-hour introduction to their new bikes, which have about 20 controls that civilian models lack. This is one of BMW's stock colors for authority vehicles.

Bottom left: Fascinating fact: authority bikes have two batteries, one for the motorcycle, and another for everything else. Without two batteries they wouldn't be able to start the engine after six hours of running lights and all the auxiliary equipment at a scene. Bob laughs, "That extra battery can run your espresso machine, and the bike will still start."

Right two photos: Civilians like buying used authority bikes and Bob says he sees them everywhere in Europe. Some officers buy them for off-duty escort work, while others buy them for pleasure. He has two on the floor at the time of this article.





to get the displaced officer back on two wheels. “We’ve never been turned down by a retail customer when we’ve asked to move our law enforcement bike ahead of them in the service schedule.”

**Community service is the motivation**

Despite having a “couple of maybe less-than-perfect interactions with law enforcement,” when he was a young man, Bob says the vast majority of police officers that he met were “really good people.” That’s one reason why he accepted an invitation to serve on the Howard County (Maryland) Police Foundation board from 2004-2014.

Bob is quick to qualify that this foundation isn’t like the telemarketing companies who claim to raise funds for law enforcement while pocketing the majority of what’s collected. The Howard County foundation funds safety initiatives that otherwise have no budgets, like one providing bikes and payroll to start patrolling a community hike-and-bike trail. They support injured and fallen officers, have upgraded a police memorial, and send needy children to summer camps, as do many similar foundations, but Howard County also funds educational scholarship for police officers to help them to become better managers, detectives and forensics specialists.

During his ten years on the board, Bob never took advantage of his position to sell motorcycles to Howard County, but they are now satisfied clients, along with:

- › Baltimore County, MD Police
- › Maryland State Police
- › Maryland National Capital Park Police
- › Prince Georges County, MD Police
- › Delaware State Police
- › Calvert County, MD Police
- › Washington, DC Police
- › Montgomery County, MD Police

Maybe you never expected to be fascinated with a story about police motorcycles—I had never given them a thought before this assignment. Now, with every news story involving police action, I think of Bob and his passion for serving this sector. I’m sure he will be happy to talk to you about it at our national rally in Waynesville, North Carolina from September 30 to October 1, 2022.

On this page: left to right General Manager Joe Sothard of Bob’s BMW, 5 motor officers, Bob, and the Delaware State Police procurement manager on delivery day, decals being applied to a Calvert County Sheriffs Department RT-P and (far left) assembling up a new bike.

