

Providing Support during MARC Supported Charity Events

For each charity event where MARC will provide support, there is an event coordinator from MARC. He or she may have one or more MARC assistants and together, they meet with event coordinators associated with the event. All communications between MARC members and the event officials should go through the MARC event coordinator. The following information is intended as a guide to help new MARC members become acclimated to the various aspects of supporting charity events as a MARC member.

Before the Event

Attend MARC Meetings

- At the MARC meetings, details of the event will be provided. If you have questions, this is a good place to ask them.
- Signup sheets will be passed around during MARC meetings. On the signup sheet, you can enter your name and some details as to the types of support needed for the event. (Sign up as early as you can so we will know how many to anticipate. This helps in assigning routes to the motors)
- The MARC event coordinator will provide information regarding the status of the coordination meetings between MARC and the coordinator from the charity organizers.

Participate In the MARC NET Meetings

- During the Wednesday NET meetings, which start at 7:30 PM, any new updates that occur between meetings are announced. There are usually updates by e-mails, but the NET meeting provides another opportunity to ask questions.
- During the week prior to the event, the MARC event coordinator will provide the details to each MARC member working that event as to when they need to arrive at the staging area.

Getting the Motorcycle Ready

- GPS - On most events, Garmin GPS routes are used by motorcyclists. The routes are distributed by e-mail about a week prior to the event with instructions on how to use them.
 - If you have a compatible GPS, you should load the routes and waypoints before arriving to the event. Sometimes, people working the event can help you load the routes and waypoints on the morning of the event. If you need this help, let people know in advance, so they can bring a laptop with the software and configuration files.
- APRS - On most events, APRS units are used by NET Control and by other MARC members to track motor locations. Although having an APRS unit on your bike is not required, it is a great benefit during the event. Details on APRS can be found at <http://www.marc-hq.org/40.technotes/40.htm>. (APRS) is an amateur radio-based system for real time tactical digital communications of information used on events or nets.

- Do the usual things; check your tires for air and usability. You should follow all the regular bike maintenance so you have a good ride and can provide support without worrying about your own ride.

What You Should Carry on your Motor

- Comfort Items – Light or heavy jacket, or both. Some mornings start out very cold then the day can later get to around 100 degrees on some events. Sunscreen. Lip balm. Gloves appropriate for the ride. Long sleeve shirt.
- Some kind of air pump. Manual or electric are probably the best since they are a onetime investment. Air cartridges work fine, but incur additional cost, since they can only be used once. Your pump should be compatible with multiple types of valve stems. You can purchase and carry adapters.
- You might want to carry basic tire changing tools, but most riders carry their own tools.
- At some events, energy bars or energy liquids may be supplied to the motors to carry should a bicyclist require help. Extra inner tubes (when supplied by the charity event sponsors).

Travel, Hotel Accommodations and Meals

Depending on the size and location of the event, some MARC members will make hotel arrangements local to the event starting or staging area. Hotel locations are usually announced well in advance of the event, so MARC members can get rooms at the same hotel. Choosing to do this allows MARC members to meet for some extra camaraderie during an evening dinner and in the morning, an early breakfast.

- Look for emails that announce the hotel MARC members will be staying at. You are welcome to choose any hotel, but staying in the same hotel allows you to be together and in some cases, discount prices are pre-arranged.
- If you plan to work the event and you will need a hotel, our advice is to get the room as early as possible. When an event has multiple thousands of bicyclists arriving to the town, the hotels anywhere near the event can fill up quickly. Most hotels allow cancelation without penalty if you cancel soon enough and within their guidelines.
- If you plan to work the event and plan to meet up with other MARC members for dinner, watch your emails or ask on the NET. Meals are usually informally announced, so if you do not ask, you may miss out on a good time. Restaurants MARC members chose to have dinner or breakfast at are often within walking distance from the hotel that is announced as the hotel of choice.

Morning the Event

- Event safety vest, owned by MARC. If you do not already have one, one will be issued to you for you to wear at all times while you work the event.
- MARC Signs for your bike. When provided by MARC, tape signs to our bikes prior to the event. These are distributed the morning of the event. The signs, taped onto your bike, identify you as MARC event volunteer.

Working the Event

The MARC event coordinator will probably be at the staging area to help you to take off on time, or will have provided you your route and departure time. There will be a lead MARC motor and a sweep or tail MARC motor. In between, are as many MARC motors as have volunteered. Some will be riding the same path as yours, while some may be supporting another route. Larger events may have many different length routes, so you need to pay attention to the route you are on. It can be easy to follow a group of bicycles that turn, but you should have gone straight. The MARC event coordinator may make suggestions as how to support the bicycles. On some events, it is safest to ride up a ways, then stop and let bikes pass, then ride further up, repeating this progress forward. On some rides, it is best to ride slowly forward until you get to the beginning of your group of bikes, then circle back to the motor riding the section behind you, then turn around and go forward again. Those riding to the rear of all the riders tend to go back and forth more, while those near the front of the first riders tend to hop forward, with less backtracking.

- When you start your support ride, this is the time to check in with NET Control. Announce "call sign" "motorcycle mobile" "leaving the staging area". This lets the NET Control know you are now mobile and supporting the bikes. NET Control will acknowledge your transmission. You can complete the transmission with "call sign".
- As you depart the staging area, you will find this area will probably be the most congested area. Use extra care here.
- When on your route, try to keep yourself staggered away from other MARC motors, unless you have been assigned to buddy up with another MARC motor.
- If you see a number of other MARC motors arriving at the rest stop you are at, that is a good indication that you need to hop on your motor and move forward.
- If you get off your motor, it is necessary to let NET Control know. This could be when helping a bicyclist or for your break. When you are riding again, let NET Control know.
- Important - If you are getting off the bike to support a bicyclist, do not broadcast the name of the rider when reporting to NET Control. Many events issue each rider a number. It is OK and recommended to broadcast the bike number. Using the number will assist the SAG units that may need to be called in to provide transport for your rider.
- Along the routes on larger events, there are usually rest stops for the bicycles. When you get to one of these, it is a good time to get off the bike and take a quick break. You may be working a long day, so your comfort and safety is important to us. It also helps you to stay alert and to be at your peak riding performance. Stock up on a few extra bottles of water for the riders who may need it. We do not carry water for the riders convenience, but sometimes, it may be needed should a rider become severely dehydrated.
- When possible, let the rider's change their own tubes. You can choose to help the rider and many of us do, but ultimately, we are not obligated to work on rider's bicycles.

These are general guidelines. Most importantly, ride in a manner that is safe for you and does not interfere with the bicycles. If there is a particular style recommended by the MARC event coordinator, use safety while following the instructions provided.

Working the Event – More things to Consider

- At no time during the event should a net controlled frequency be used for casual conversations.
- At no time, should you allow a bicyclist to ride on your motorcycle. The liability is too great and their gear is not designed for the motorcycle.
- If you come across an emergency situation, secure your own safety, then safety of the rider, call in to Net Control or 911 then call NET Control.
- After the emergency situation is addressed, then deal with the bicycles involved. (Recent concerns have been raised recently regarding excessive charges occurring in some locations when calling 911. I will not address this here. We are volunteers and will need to make decisions on what action we take on a case by case basis. At minimum, all emergency situations need to be called into NET Control)
- If you arrive at NET Control at any time during the event, do not speak to those working the net or start up conversations in the vicinity of those running the net. Your work may be done, but they are still working. MARC members staffing NET Control need to focus on their responsibilities until the net is officially closed.

Important Note

If you have any concerns about how the charity event is being handled by the organizers, SAG units or any volunteer team associated to the event, address these issues with the MARC event coordinator. Speak to him confidentially or if appropriate during the next MARC meeting where your comments are usually solicited in an open discussion. There have been occasions where the charity event organizers may not have contributed to our providing smooth support. Please, at no time, address problem issues with the charity event staff or organizers. It will not be conducive to good will between our groups.

Final Thoughts for Event Support

We are all volunteers on these events and no one works harder than the MARC event coordinator. Help him out by arriving early, being flexible, and being patient. Some day you may be in his position and you will expect the same from those riding the event that you helped to organize. The MARC event coordinator may be very busy the morning of the event, so spend time talking to the other MARC members. Respect the event coordinators time so he can focus on his job.

From the moment you arrive for the event, remember you are representing MARC. You should ride comfortably and ride safe. Enjoy the ride, be friendly and use every bit of good driving skills you can muster. You will be supporting very experienced to very inexperienced bicycle riders. Most riders are courteous, but you will find many ignoring traffic laws since they think being on a sponsored event excludes them from traffic laws. Local police will be aware of the event and most try to help, but many officers feel these events are an intrusion, so they may be eagerly handing out tickets as bikes (and motorcycles) pass through their patrol area. Most officers tend to be supportive of the events, but remember we do not have any special status that allows us to break traffic laws.

We are licensed motorcycles on public roads. Please, follow all traffic laws. It is safer for you and for the bicyclists. You are responsible for your own safety on these events.

If you were finished supporting the event on your bike, this would be a good time to mingle with those who rode bicycles in support of the charities. You will find them to be very grateful for your support of the event. Many have heartwarming personal stories to share.

My Final Comments

If you have never ridden an event with MARC, let me share this with you. In 2009, I rode support for the MS Bay to Bay, which ended in San Diego. While walking around the finish area, I met a young girl who stood with her dad. I recognized both of them from the ride. They were with her mother, who was confined to a wheelchair. The daughter smiled at me, said thanks for my help and proudly proclaimed to me that she rode both days in support that someday, her mom would walk again. All the way home, I had people in cars pull up beside me and shout a big thank you. The last one was less than a mile from my freeway exit, which was about a 100 miles from the event. At first, it was a little disconcerting. Once I got used to them doing this, if my heart could swell even larger, it would have. It was a wonderful feeling knowing that MARC and I as a MARC member made a difference in people's lives.

There can be a lot to absorb the first time you work a charity event with MARC, but if you keep it simple, it will be. MARC is a group of dedicated people who have a love for HAM radio, motorcycle and providing support for charity events. Since starting with MARC, I have learned a lot from MARC members. My hope is that the above information will help to make your participation with MARC and MARC events to be as fun and rewarding as mine have been.

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