

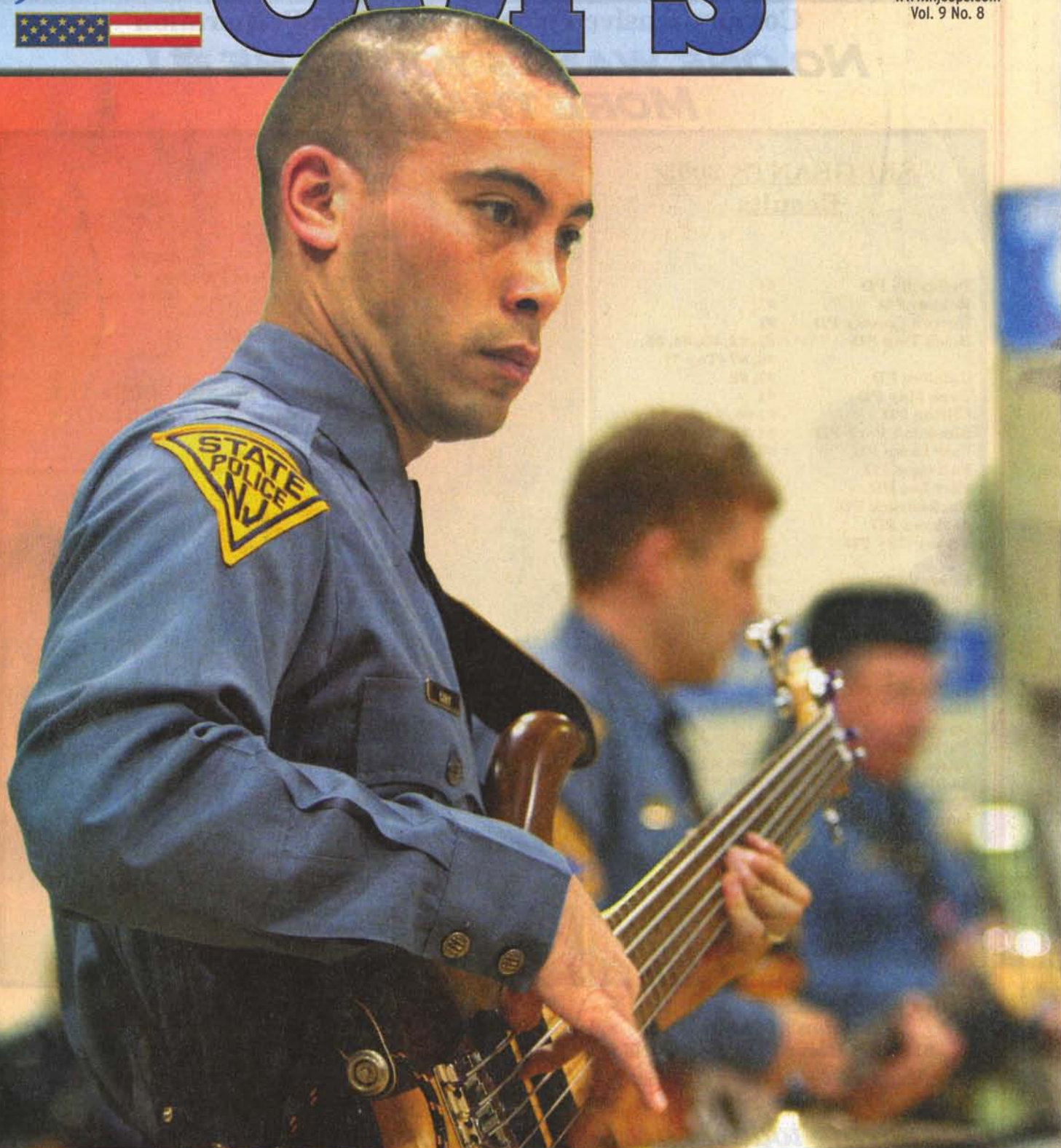
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Band of Brothers

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Fitness tests: another look

■ BY MATT BRZYCKI

I received some feedback from several police officers (and others) about the two articles that I wrote on fitness tests that were published in the January and February 2006 issues of *New Jersey COPS*. One of the individuals said something like this: "Your article described a lot of the components that shouldn't be in a fitness test but can you elaborate more on the components that should be in a fitness test?" Good feedback.



Matt Brzycki

RECOMMENDED COMPONENTS

What follows are some general ideas and recommendations for the components of a fitness test that are appropriate for police officers. Keep in mind that these are just general comments. Individuals who are tasked with creating a fitness test should take into consideration the specific operational requirements of their department as well as the characteristics of their community (specifically, urban versus rural).

Run/Sprint

It's safe to say that at some point in the performance of their jobs, police officers will have to run. For instance, an officer may have to chase down a suspect or respond quickly to an emergency that's down the block. Therefore, some type of running should be part of a fitness test for police officers. An important follow-up question is, "What distance is appropriate?" Unfortunately, there's no definitive answer to that question. In general, though, a test should involve running a distance that's between about 1 and 1.5 miles; there's little need to assess whether or not an officer can run more than about 1.5 miles. Let's face it, an officer who has to run much more than that would simply get in the squad car and drive there.

Here's an option to consider: Instead of having a 1-mile run as part of the fitness test, for example, two 0.5-mile runs (880 yards) can be included with a designated period of recovery between the two efforts. In both cases, of course, the overall distance is the same: 1.0 mile. But doing two 0.5-mile runs actually assess different aspects of fitness, including the ability to recover sufficiently after an intense exer-

tion in order to perform another intense exertion. (If two or more 0.5-mile runs are to be done, a recovery period of about 3 - 4 minutes should be allowed between efforts.)

Any running that a police officer does is more likely to be an all-out sprint than a long-distance run. (But it's still a good idea to include longer distances in a fitness test to assess the capacity to endure for longer periods of time.) A fitness test that's related to the job of a police officer, then, should also include some type of sprinting.

There are a number of ways to incorporate sprinting into a fitness test. One way is to simply do one sprint of a given distance (such as 100 yards). Another is to do a series of sprints with a designated period of recovery between each sprint. So, the test might require an officer to do six 40-yard sprints with one minute of recovery between the efforts. Again, this adds the element of recovery into the mix. A final option is to include some type of shuttle run in which an officer runs back and forth several times around two cones that are spaced, say, 20 yards apart. Besides assessing the ability to sprint short distances as quickly as possible, a shuttle run also assesses the ability to change direction.

Another point: Officers who are assigned to a bike patrol should perform some type of cycling as part of their fitness test; similarly, officers who may be involved in water-borne operations should perform some type of swimming as part of their fitness test. By the way, a fitness test that uses cycling and/or swimming should still include a running component.

Fence Climb

When police officers have to take off in an all-out sprint, the odds are that they won't encounter a clear path. In chasing down a suspect, for example, it's conceivable that an officer might have to "hop" a chain-link or wooden fence. As a result, it would be a good idea to include this task in a fitness test. Should the fence be chain-link or wood? That depends on what each department mostly has in their community. Also keep in mind that scaling a chain-link fence and a wooden fence involve slightly different skills.

Object Hurdle

Another obstruction that might be encountered while running is some type of object on the ground that must be hurdled. Again, it's a good idea to incorporate this element into a fitness test.

Low Crawl

Sometimes, a police officer may have to crawl to go under an obstacle or to avoid detection. Once again, including this component in a fitness test is a good move.

Stair Climb

In the performance of their job, police officers often have to run up flights of stairs. A fitness test for police officers, then, should include running up flights of stairs. How many flights? That depends on the general height of the commercial and/or residential buildings in a particular community.

Yes, many buildings have elevators but they're not always operational and not always the best option from a tactical standpoint. That said, just because the Goldman Sachs Building has 42 floors doesn't mean that a fitness test for the Jersey City Police Department should include running up 84 flights of stairs. For the most part, running up 6 - 8 flights of stairs (3 - 4 floors) is adequate for a fitness test.

Officer Carry/Drag

Unfortunately, a police officer may have to carry/drag a fellow officer out of harm's way. Even though this action may only occur rarely, it's still one of the most important tasks that an officer could ever perform. Some type of carry/drag - preferably using a real person rather than an inanimate object (such as a dummy) - should be included in a fitness test. And don't pick the lightest officer in the department to carry/drag. If anything, the heaviest officer should be used.

Pull-up

Most calisthenic-type exercises - such as the push-up and sit-up/curl-up/crunch - aren't good choices in a fitness test for police officers. The main reason is that they're not related to the job requirements of a police officer. One calisthenic-type exercise that can - and should - be done in a fitness test is the pull-up (or "vertical pull"). This exercise involves the pulling muscles of the torso - the upper back,

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biceps and lower arms – and is similar to pulling the body up onto a ledge or fence.

Dip

Another calisthenic-type exercise that's related to the job requirements of a police officer is the dip (or "vertical push"). This exercise involves the pushing muscles of the torso – the chest, shoulders and triceps – and is similar to pushing the body up onto a ledge or fence.

Obstacle Course

The vast majority of the aforementioned recommendations for a fitness test can be fashioned into an obstacle course (or an "O-Course") that must be completed as quickly as possible. For instance, an officer might sprint 40 yards, do three dips, sprint 30 yards, low crawl five yards, sprint 20 yards, do three pull-ups, sprint 10 yards, hop a six-foot chain-link fence, sprint 20 yards, hurdle a series of four low-lying objects, sprint 30 yards, carry/drag another

officer 10 yards and sprint 40 yards.

Naturally, there are an infinite number of possibilities for the design of an O-Course. And an O-Course doesn't have to be expensive. One way to craft an O-Course on a zero budget is to use a local park. Many parks have some type of "fitness trail" that can be used. When designing an O-Course at a park, incorporate those stations that are most related to the job requirements of a police officer and ignore those that are not.

INCENTIVES

The most valid fitness test in the world is meaningless if the participation is low. If a fitness test isn't mandatory, it's not a bad idea to offer some type of incentive for encouraging officers to participate. For instance, police officers in Chicago are given \$250 for volunteering to take a fitness test. It was reported that the first year that this incentive was offered, participation rocketed from about 2.5 percent of the

force to about 20 percent.

Or instead of a monetary incentive, perhaps officers who take the test get a "comp day" and the one who performs the best gets an extra day. Departmental budgets that don't allow these types of expenditures can award participants who meet the requisite standards with a fitness patch, pin or T-shirt. And maybe the best performer is recognized with a plaque.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Fitness tests can be designed in many ways. But the best tests for police officers are those in which the components are related to their job.

Matt Brzycki is the coordinator of Recreational Fitness and Wellness at Princeton University in Princeton. A former Marine Drill Instructor, he has authored, co-authored or edited 14 books on strength and fitness, including SWAT Fitness (available at www.operationaltactics.org).

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