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Photo by MC2 Kevin S. O'Brien

WASHINGTON — Acting Secretary of the Navy the Honorable B.J. Penn (Right) watches a motorcycle simulator demonstration by Lt. Kim Thompson during a Joint Service Motorcycle Safety Event held at the Pentagon.

Motorcycle Safety Month gets kick-started May 1

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Acting Secretary of the Navy the Honorable B.J. Penn

ARLINGTON, Va. — Acting Secretary of the Navy B.J. Penn said May 1 that motorcycle safety is a priority for the Department of the Navy and that he looks forward to a time when motorcycle safety is so instilled in the nation's culture, that never again does the Navy have to grieve another man killed or lost to motorcycle accidents.

Penn made his comments at the third annual National Capitol Region Joint Service Motorcycle Safety Event in the north parking lot of the Pentagon.

"When average Americans think about the dangers that go into waging war they think of threats in lands far, far away," Penn said. "But when a year goes by and we lose more Sailors and Marines on motorcycles, than in support of the war, we are in many ways referring to a battle being fought at home in our own backyard — and our Marine Corps last year lost more people on motorcycles than we did in combat."

Celebrities such as the reigning Miss USA, Kristen Dalton, mingled with service members and military officials at the event that featured booths with safety information, three motorcycle simulators and demonstrations by the

Pentagon Police and world racing champion Kevin Schwartz.

Also featured was a motorcycle rodeo, a Le Mans Start Skill Challenge, food by the Grill Sergeant, Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) demonstrations and a group ride.

"I think the event is going very well; I am very pleased with the amount of non-DoD support we have here," said Rear Adm. Arthur J. Johnson of the Naval Safety Center. "This is a great way to kick off the start of May as Motorcycle Awareness Month."

Motorcycle trainer Rusty Reynolds, who trains the Navy SEALs, was on hand to discuss motorcycle protective gear, as well as demonstrate the differences, in quality, between a \$70 helmet and a \$300 helmet.

"In motorcycles you get what you pay for," Reynolds said. "If you buy a cheap helmet there's a reason it's cheap."

Reynolds said helmets can run as expensive as \$700 and that those that have a "crush zone" have a greater ability to absorb the impact of a crash.

"I like to say stupid hurts," said Reynolds, mentioning that some states do not require a rider to wear a helmet.

One of the most popular

MOTORCYCLE: Penn said May 1 that motorcycle safety is a priority for the DoN

Continued from page A1

exhibits at the safety event was the motorcycle simulator provided by Tulsa-based Simulator Systems International. The simulators taught the basic procedures of motorcycle riding and gave more experienced riders a chance to try their skills on a simulated sports bike.

"You have to be on your game, (the sports bike) is very touchy. I had to bond with that bike," said Peaches Hainline, who has been riding motorcycles for 25 years. "I like to say that riding a motorcycle is like tap dancing on a land mine. You have to know what you are doing and be careful."

For fiscal year 2008, sports bikes were in 88 percent of Navy and Marine Corps fatalities.

According to figures on the Naval Safety Center Web site, as of March 15 the Navy had experienced 14 deaths in fiscal 2009 from motorcycle-related accidents and the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) had experienced 22.

In fiscal 2008 the U.S. Navy experienced a total of 33 fatalities and the USMC had

experienced 25. In the three years, fiscal 2006 to fiscal 2008, there were a total of 139 deaths across the Navy and Marine Corps.

"Three years ago a motorcycle accident took the life of a friend of mine, a friend named Richard Dawson. Richard was not just a member of the Navy family he was also one of my best friends," said Penn. "A purple heart recipient, Richard survived extreme combat conditions in Vietnam but he could not survive an extreme motorcycle collision in Virginia."

Penn said the best way to honor Dawson and the other Navy personnel who have died as a result of motorcycle accidents is to make motorcycle safety a priority.

"Just last year the services stepped up their efforts to reverse that disturbing trend," Penn said. "Statistics are showing that your efforts are working, which is encouraging, but you don't work such long hours and make so many sacrifices (just) to improve statistics."

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See MOTORCYCLE, A7

Thursday, May 7, 2009 | THE FLAGSHIP | A7