



S. Dau

HANDLE WITH CARE

By Brian McNamara

WHAT weighs six-and-a-half tonnes and has six pairs of pigskin gloves?

The answer is above. No, Acting Sergeant Ian Whyte is not the 6.5 tonner. All that gear, plus the crew, goes into ACT's new rescue vehicle. I suppose, with the crew, that puts seven tonnes on the road.

Which is where the six-litre diesel Hino spends most of its time. With a range of duties, from motor vehicle accidents to the collection of evidence for the CIB, the ACT Rescue Squad maintains a rapid-response readiness for anything from a welfare-type emergency to a major disaster.

Up-to-date communications equipment enables the Hino crew to talk with the ACT police network, the NSW Police, and ACT Emergency Services. A scanner is carried to keep the crew in touch with most other people using radio communications.

The chassis-mounted 6.5 kVA alternator can provide enough power to drive a huge range of emergency equipment and lighting. Lighting includes not only powerful floods and spots but also miners' lamps for hazardous situations.

Fire-retardant and chemical-proof suits are provided. Appropriate gas-detection and electrical-testing gear ensure a high level of safety in an emergency. The crew has a comprehensive range of machinery for confidently handling a motor vehicle accident.

Pushers, pullers and lifters of several kinds are carried. These include both high and low-pressure air bags. Medical apparatus includes sufficient spinal-injury and resuscitation gear to hold a patient stable until the arrival of an ambulance.

If the crew needs to take to the water — a likely possibility with Canberrans' liking for aquatic recreation — wet suits and a six-man inflatable boat are available.

If they need to, the Rescue Squad can cut or stretch their way through masonry or steel, with protection for their ears, eyes or noses.

The Hino has a single rear axle with dual wheels. Other lightly-equipped four-wheel drive vehicles are available for bush work, and as most of the rescue work for which the Hino is intended is likely to be in the urban environment, multi-wheel drive was not considered essential for this comprehensive unit.

So what are the pigskin gloves for?

The list of climbing gear enables the crew to climb up, down, across or just about anywhere using ropes or ladders or — now you've guessed it — hands.

