



# Christmas on the beat

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**From a policing perspective, activity over the Christmas-New Year period in Canberra has the potential to move from busy to challenging at any hour of the night or day.**

Working at the coalface of policing in the national capital are the City Beats, Traffic Operations, Specialist Response and Security (SRS) teams, Territory Investigations Group detectives and the General Duties Patrols.

During the pre-Christmas shopping period in Canberra, the experience is no different to any other major city; impatient motorists, shoppers aplenty and the festive air punctuated by the complaints of tired, overheated children.

The Beats and General Duties teams could claim their work is the most interesting and diverse, at all levels requiring interaction with the general public and coping with a broad range of issues from drunken, violent revellers to lost property.

Out on the beat, uniformed officers are keenly aware they are the public face of ACT Policing. This work demands exercising

good judgement and using words – not actions – to calm potentially inflammatory situations.

This summer, as has been common practice in recent years, the office-in-charge of City Station, Sergeant Matt Varley, will “buddy up” the new recruits as often as possible with experienced Beats members. It’s a proven way of familiarising new recruits unfamiliar with the city, while “leaning” on the experience of fellow officers.

Working in pairs, they mingle with the crowd, stop for a chat here and there, answer questions, and even offer directions. To the general public, the sight of the respected uniforms and badges offer reassurance.

While fully kitted out and trained to handle trouble, it's sometimes surprising to new recruits how much presence is provided by the blue uniform, especially when accompanied as required by a firm, authoritative voice. Assigned specifically to the city zone, within a few shifts the officers get to know every hidden corner and dark alley, and those places and times when trouble is most likely to occur.

Traffic Operations is a team under considerable pressure around this time. Intelligence gathered from interstate over previous years is one of the tools used by Traffic to determine the most suitable times and locations to target roadside breath testing.

While ACT Policing Traffic Ops and the NSW Police Monaro District Command work closely throughout the year on various joint operations, the high traffic volumes in and out of the Territory during this period step up the relationship. Speeding and seat belts, as always, are a high enforcement priority.

December planning focuses on preparing for one of Australia's biggest modified car festivals, Summernats, which attracts thousands of visitors, mostly from throughout NSW, Victoria and Queensland. This flood of visitors into the National Exhibition Centre in Lyneham starts shortly after the New Year.

In late 2003 the ACT was the first police jurisdiction in Australia to deploy the RAPID (Recognition and Analysis of Plates Identified and Detected) number plate recognition technology. This leading-edge equipment was adopted quickly in the ACT largely because the AFP was instrumental in its technical development.

An information technology specialist with the AFP, Federal Agent Tony Jackson, "wrote" a major part of the software which provides an interface between the cameras and the databank. Federal Agent Jackson received a Commissioner's commendation for his work in July last year.

The system uses fast-scan digital cameras and interfaces via cable link to a laptop using the Jackson-developed software which records and checks each number plate against stored data.

The system has the potential to not only identify stolen and unregistered vehicles and those known not to have compulsory third party insurance, but also those suspected to be driven by disqualified or unlicensed, or drivers who have warrants outstanding against them. After the licence plates are scanned

and identified, police have the option of stopping the vehicle at the time, or proceeding with offences recorded against the driver.

Through a co-operative program with Roads and Traffic Authority inspectors, hundreds of Summernats-bound cars are directed through a traffic stop and assessed for roadworthiness as they pour over the border.

Most of the 'Nats-bound vehicles are modified from production but generally these enthusiasts take great care to fall within roadworthiness guidelines. One common point of contention, however, is idle noise – and a microphone at the exhaust pipe soon makes that objective adjudication.

Several hundred of the cars heading to Canberra for Summernats will never be driven on the public road. They are towed to the venue clad in dust covers, and strapped down tightly within enclosed trailers. The subject of weeks of polishing, buffing and meticulous preparation, the Nats' mega-dollar show cars are consistently judged as the best in the country.

By New Year's Eve, while many Canberrans are holidaying on NSW's south coast, splashing in the surf, wetting a line or soaking up the sun, the ACT Policing effort goes on around the clock. Lessons learned walking beats and on patrol around the streets of Canberra have proved invaluable to the training of all sworn AFP officers in their service throughout Australia and overseas.

The pride instilled in wearing the uniform is never forgotten, no matter how far from home the posting.