

LEARNING TO DRIVE TO SAVE YOUR LIFE

by the Editor

"So you think you can drive a car . . . ?" I did, but that was before I observed Chief Driving Instructor, Senior Constable Lee Jones, at the wheel of a Holden sedan at the Australian Federal Police Driver Training Centre in Canberra recently.

After a nerve-wracking run around the Centre's three courses (including a very greasy skid pan), I breathed a sigh of relief and vowed never to drive without a seat-belt . . . ever! Senior Constable Jones's only comment was: "That was a straightforward run, no thrills attached."

Opened in April, 1979, the Centre was the brain-child of Sergeant Jack Morris (now retired), Chief Superintendent McConachy and former Commissioner, Mr R. A. Wilson, as an addition to recruit and service training.

The basic concept of the Centre was taken from the New South Wales Driver Training Centre at St Ives. However, it encompasses several unique features. Before the Centre was opened, all driver training was carried out on public streets and disused roads.

Whatever a driver/rider may face on routine patrol, in high-speed pursuit or ambush attack on vehicles, the Centre's training caters for every situation one could encounter on the road.

All students enrolled at the Centre undertake the minimum ten-day driver training course which consists of knowledge of vehicle components and their functions, sign of wear, films, classroom lectures, before finally, a chance to put all their knowledge to the test behind the wheel.

One could well be cynical, after years of driving, when being enrolled for a driver training course. All who enrol must forget that they have ever driven a vehicle before. As Senior Constable Jones says: "Like life in general, you never stop learning; what students are taught here could save their life."



Not only is emphasis placed on safe driving but on vehicle maintenance and how to prevent mechanical damage through careless driving. Although high speed driving is part of the Centre's training programme, a low-key approach is adopted. Police, like civilians, must obey traffic laws and they have a special responsibility to set an example for the public.

The Centre includes a garage complex (for its three cars and seven motorcycles), offices, classrooms

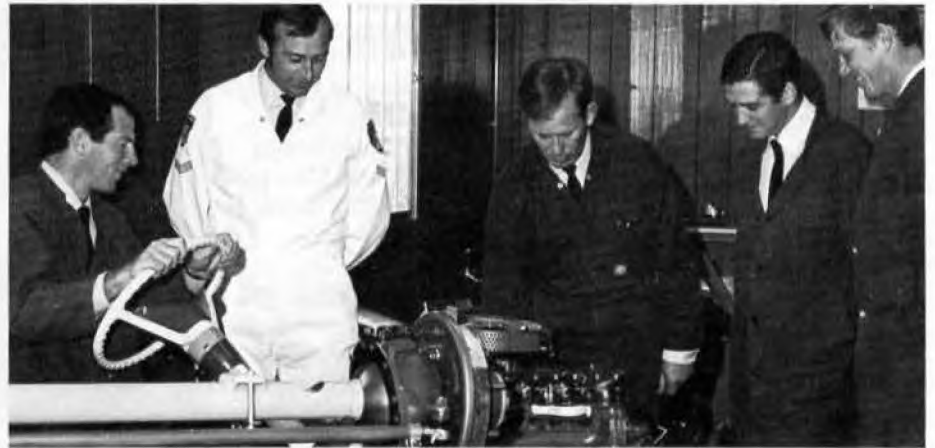
EAGLES' EYE ON A.F.P.

Constable Wayne Eagles, Protective Services, Canberra, joined the former Commonwealth Police Force two years ago.

Wayne, 31, has for some time combined a humorous outlook on life with a natural ability as a cartoonist.

However, until PLATYPUS discovered Wayne, only his family and close friends had been able to enjoy his doodlings.

Happily, Wayne has agreed to become PLATYPUS' resident cartoonist and this is his initial effort.



complete with film projectors and static display rooms.

Static displays depicting cut-away sections of engines, diffs, gearboxes, steering assemblies, suspension components and motorcycles all feature in the driver education programme. In addition, on display are damaged mechanical parts which tell their own sorry story of driver attitude, vehicle misuse and abuse.

Driving facilities include concrete skid-pan covered with water and oil, a 100 x 100 metre manoeuvring pan, a motorcycle cross-country track (2 km with many obstacles), a four-wheel drive course and 2½ km of two-way roadway, complete with road-markings and standard traffic signs.

The latter has every conceivable curve, dip, gradient, corner and bitumenised road surface likely to be found on any road in Australia. The only thing missing is traffic.

The various types of driver training courses include:

- 10 day standard driver course
- 15 day pursuit driver
- 25 day motorcycle
- 8 day four-wheel drive heavy vehicle
- 5 day four wheel drive
- 5 day omnibus driver
- 3 day V.I.P. driver course

As well, refresher courses of up to three days are conducted at determined intervals.

Additionally, various special courses are conducted as required, with personnel enrolling from other Government Departments, Ambulance, Australian Capital Territory Emergency Services and Australian Capital Territory Schools Authority.

Defensive driving, anticipating

traffic movement, intersection approach, reversing, braking, steering and use of accelerator to manoeuvre a vehicle are some of the features of driver training. A segment of classroom lectures deals with driver attitude.

On the track/pans, each student has an instructor beside him/her to explain errors in judgement and vehicle handling at high and low speeds and, of course, to instill confidence.

Following classroom lectures and experience gained on the three courses, students are taken to downtown Canberra to negotiate city traffic with an instructor continually monitoring student driver ability.

Besides Senior Constable Jones, the other instructors are Senior Constables Brian Griffin, Carl Christie, Mike DeLandre and First Constable John Hebron.

All are dedicated instructors and are capable of driving or riding all vehicles.

Each officer I spoke to was obviously orientated more to defensive driving than to speed, and expressed their desire to see a cut-back in accident/damage to police vehicles.

Australian Federal Police has some 418 vehicles and 65 motorcycles in its fleet, travelling millions of kilometres per year. Unfortunately to date not all members or drivers have had the opportunity to attend the Driver Training Centre. Statistics reveal many instances of vehicle damage occurring which could well have been avoided if the drivers concerned had learned a few facts from the Centre's experienced team.

• **Opposite page: Senior Constable Jones (white overalls) and students; below: media representatives were invited to the Centre when the 'Flying Finn', Rauno Aaltonen, conducted a special driving course there recently.**

