



Looking Beyond the License Plate

2008 IACP Annual Conference
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San Diego, California



This program recognizes law enforcement officers whose observations of a license plate resulted in the apprehension of a suspect or the resolution of a crime.

2008 Grand Prize Winner:

Corporal Daniel Melanson
Campbellton, New Brunswick, Canada

2008 Honorable Mention Winners:



Trooper Christopher D. Dunn, Colorado Springs Patrol, CO

Troopers Martin Gonglik & Jeffrey Ogradowski, Pennsylvania State Police

Officer Christopher Kocur, Far Hills Police Department, NJ

Officer Edward Lomazov, Philadelphia Police Department, PA

Officer Brian Scioli, Raleigh Police Department, NC

The **Looking Beyond the License Plate Program** is co-sponsored by The Highway Safety Committee of the International Association of the Chief's of Police and 3M

Grand Prize and Honorable Mentions Stories

Corporal Daniel Melanson, Grand Prize Winner

On October 24, 2007, Constable Melanson was off duty and travelling northbound on Route 11, near Nash Creek, New Brunswick, Canada. The police officer overtook a white full-size van which he noticed had an amateur tint job on the rear window. In that the van was a recent model, the questionable tint job sparked Constable Melanson's interest in the van. He also noted that its driver looked straight ahead and was driving under the posted speed limit. Constable Melanson took note of the license plate number, called it in and learned that the van hailed from the Province of Ontario but did not come back as stolen.

When Constable Melanson began his shift that same night, he looked for the van and further examined the printouts from CPIC, the Canadian Police Information Centre, on the vehicle. In the morning, Constable Melanson mentioned the van to the oncoming day shift. On October 25, 2007, at approximately 10:45 hrs, Constables Nelson Levesque and Stephane Gagnon were on patrol in the City of Campbellton when they spotted a suspicious vehicle - 2006 GMC Savana van, white in color, bearing Ontario license plate 5123RZ. When Constables Levesque and Gagnon activated the marked police car's emergency equipment, the vehicle failed to stop and made attempts to evade police.

The driver of the van drove through a crowded parking lot and then led the constables on a hazardous pursuit through the streets of Campbellton. At one point, constables halted the chase in a school zone but re-engaged once the van took a turn down a dead-end street. As the constables approached the van on foot, the driver got out and fled into the woods. After a short foot chase, Constable Gagnon (only six weeks removed from the RCMP Training Academy) arrested the fleeing suspect and handcuffed him. The suspect informed the arresting officers that they had caught a "big fish" and identified himself as Richard Lee McNair, a fugitive from the United States. When the constables logged onto the America's Most Wanted website, photos of Richard Lee McNair clearly resembled the person in custody and identified him as one of the fifteen most wanted persons in America. His biography on the website stated that this person was a convicted murderer who escaped three times from U.S. prisons. The flamboyant nature of his escapes were underlined in the text and extra precautions were taken to ensure he would not escape from RCMP custody. Constable Daniel Melanson, the off-duty police officer who observed the questionable tint job on a relatively new van, noted the plate number, ran the plate and shared this intelligence with his colleagues, showed a commitment to teamwork and intelligence-led policing. While he believed the driver of the van may have been smuggling drugs or contraband tobacco, Constable Melanson's keen observation skills and subsequent actions led to the capture of Richard Lee McNair, one of the United States' most sought fugitives.

Trooper Christopher Dunn - Honorable Mention

On the evening of January 23, 2008, Trooper Chris Dunn of the Colorado State Patrol was patrolling Interstate 25 in El Paso County, Colorado. He observed a vehicle approaching him from the rear that appeared hesitant to pass him. He slowed his patrol car and noticed that neither the driver nor the passenger would make eye contact with him. As the vehicle passed Trooper Dunn, he checked the rear license plate using his in-car computer. The validation tabs displayed on the rear license plate indicated an expiration date of April 2008. However, the information obtained from the DMV's computer indicated an expiration date of 2007. Given the inconsistency of the information obtained from the DMV and what was on the license plate, Trooper Dunn initiated a traffic stop. Upon contact, Trooper Dunn discovered, through routine clearances, that the driver was a fugitive and the subject of a nationwide arrest warrant. The suspect was wanted for attempted 2nd degree murder, two counts of 2nd degree kidnapping, assault with a deadly weapon, robbery and extortion. It was also determined that the suspect's license was revoked for DUI and there were three restraining orders against him, in addition to his extensive criminal history. To avoid potential injury to members of the motoring public, Trooper Dunn and assisting officers shut down the interstate while they conducted a "high-risk" stop, removing the suspect and passengers at gunpoint. The suspect was subsequently taken into custody without further incident and without injury to the public or the officers involved. If not for Trooper Dunn having observed the unusual behavior of the driver and the discrepancy involving the registration tabs on the rear license plate of the vehicle, a wanted, dangerous fugitive would have continued to evade capture.

Troopers Martin Gonglik and Jeffrey Ogradowski - Honorable Mention

Troopers Gonglik and Ogradowski observed a vehicle in the area of Cigarette City on Jefferson Ave. in the City of Washington, Washington Co., PA. The vehicle pulled into the parking lot and stopped on the side of the building, where the driver got out. After returning to the vehicle, it was observed traveling on Jefferson Ave. to Co Go's (Jefferson at Third Street) where an occupant exited. The vehicle then traveled on to Meadow Alley with PSP following. After observing some registration plate violations, expired registration and no registration light, they initiated a traffic stop at the intersection of Fayette Street and Grove Ave. (City of Washington). The operator of the vehicle, D. Booher M-18 of Washington, PA was asked for his required documents. He related that he didn't have a driver's license and that he did not own the vehicle. Gonglik advised Booher to open the glove compartment to look for the registration and insurance card. Booher and the other passengers ignored his request. Booher was asked to exit the vehicle due to the fact that he was 18 and the smell of alcoholic was coming from the vehicle. He was given a PBT test and evaluated. It was determined that he was not impaired but the rear passenger was intoxicated. Ogradowski filled out consent to search and asked to search the vehicle. Booher denied the request. Booher was advised of why he was being cited and that the vehicle was going to be towed from the scene. All of the occupants were told to exit the vehicle. After they exited, several live rounds of ammunition were observed on the back seat and a firearm was discovered on the floor of the rear passenger side. All occupants were detained. On the rear driver side floor, another pistol was found. In the glove box —2 pistols were found.

Officer Christopher Kocur, Far Hills Police Department, NJ – Honorable Mention

Officer Chris Kocur was dispatched to a disabled vehicle in the roadway. He found two suspects acting very suspicious. He ran the license plates through the NCIC which revealed no violations. Officer Kocur had the suspects give him their names and information, which were completely false. He interviewed the suspects separately to locate more information and discovered their stories didn't match. Both were arrested for hindering the investigation. When the suspects were searched, a Digital Camera was found in the pants of the passenger. This camera would be the ultimate link to a burglary. The suspects had jewelry on them and in their vehicle along with other stolen items. Officer Kocur found that the digital camera had images of a family not related to the suspects. A license plate could be seen in one of the photos. The License plate was run through NCIC and the registered owner was called. He told the police that the digital camera was in his bedroom when he left for work. How could the camera be in our possession? We sent officers to the victim's house and discovered the forced entry Burglary. Officer Kocur had just arrested the burglars after they committed a forced break in. He recovered all of the victims stolen items, discovered the burglary before the victim got home, and was able to have the victim come to the Far Hills Police Department to identify and recover his stolen property. Both suspects are in jail and most likely will be there for a long time with their long history of criminal convictions in the past.

Police Officer Edward Lomazov – Honorable Mention

On February 21, 2008 at approximately 5:12 a.m., Officer Edward Lomazov was assigned to RPC 917 in the area of 800 Perkiomen Street. Officer Lomazov was on patrol when he observed, parked and unattended, a 1989 Chevrolet Caprice, PA license plate #ENN5672. Officer Lomazov recognized this as a stolen vehicle that had recently been used in several burglaries throughout the downtown area of Philadelphia. Officer Lomazov coordinated surveillance of the vehicle and an arrest was made clearing four burglaries.

Master Officer Brian C. Scioli – Honorable Mention

Officer Scioli stopped a suspect for expired tags. The suspect refused to give his name and had no identification on him. Officer Scioli placed the suspect under arrest and investigated further to try to identify him but was unable to do so at this time. Through additional investigative efforts, Officer Scioli was able to identify the suspect as Mark Thomas, learning that he was the #4 most wanted person in Jamaica for two murders and a shooting, and authorities have been looking for him for approximately eight years. The jail had already released the suspect. Officer Scioli notified "ICE" agents led the charge to find the suspect and on March 6, 2008, Officer Scioli located the suspect, Mark Thomas. Officer Scioli continued communications with ICE agents and Jamaican officials, and on March 26, 2008, the suspect was flown to Georgia, then to Jamaica where he was handed over to authorities.