

NON-TRIVIAL PURSUITS

Forget the TV shows – this is how it's really done. **Richard Webber** hitches a ride on public roads and the track with Police Scotland's aces of chase

PHOTOGRAPHY STUART PRICE



The build-up of traffic is the result of a rolling 'roadblock' created by police vehicles

Blues and twos belonging to a pair of marked police Volvo V70s suggest that the driver of the scruffy black Y-reg Ford Mondeo in front should carefully take to the hard shoulder of Perthshire's northbound M90. It's not a rare sight on our motorways, and the drama is usually curtailed there and then.

But not today. Initially, the driver seems to comply, slowing and turning in. A stab and a steer later, he's back on the carriageway and

barrelling away fast. Inspector Darren Faulds' expression hasn't changed. Behind the wheel, he looks sun-lounger relaxed. Sitting to his left, I can almost feel my pupils dilating, and from behind, photographer Stuart Price says his heart rate has just doubled.

We reel in the Mondeo and establish a buffer of 30 metres or so behind it. Slightly staggered, the V70s command a lane each, sometimes adopting single file to avoid civilian cars in the wake of the

erratically meandering Ford, which is nearing three-figure speeds. We push up and block off exits as we go, creating a funnel effect. Then the pace drops abruptly as all three cars are forced to burrow messily through a traffic jam. It turns out to be a rolling roadblock engineered by two more police cars at its head

to slow the subject down and clear the carriageway in front. The Mondeo eventually breaks free and accelerates, but three police vehicles swoop in to surround it. They tighten formation, using the guardrail as a fourth wall, until all four vehicles slow smoothly to a halt as one six-tonne, 16-wheeled unit.



Although it seems incredibly lifelike – heightened by the knowledge that these are active public roads – we're actually experiencing day two of this week's pursuit management course operated by the newly unified Police Scotland force from its Tulliallan Castle training college near Falkirk. Instructors have just shown the three students in attendance the course's primary endgame tactic, 'containment', by pursuing and confining Sergeant Colin Reid →



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The foremost driver should barely feel the nudge of connection from behind



The rearmost driver aims to place his car's bumper against the subject car's gently and square on



The trainee officers learn the theory of co-ordinated containment manoeuvres

and his Mondeo – a buffer-wearing, part-oxidised (if much-loved) carcass worthy of Mad Max.

Reid – a veteran of multiple real-life containments – runs the course, overseen by Faulds, who literally wrote the book on it and helps shape road policing tactics for the entire UK. Faulds explains the value of pursuit management. “The subject used to have control,” he says, “and we’d end up with a ‘caravan effect’, where a long line of police vehicles would tack on behind. I’d find myself battling past panda cars just to reach the subject. Now, we prepare for a pursuit before it happens and take control of the situation, bringing it to a conclusion quickly and safely. We avoid inducing pursuits, but if one does materialise, we give the subject every chance to stop.”

Such preparation is orchestrated by a control room, assembling pursuit-appropriate vehicles and drivers when a chase is anticipated by a patrol that’s tailing a suspicious car. The patrol paints a picture of the scene: location, traffic, weather, surface conditions, subject’s manner of driving and speed. The subject is encouraged towards certain roads: quiet, narrow single-carriageways that allow easier containment, or motorways, where one direction of traffic and ample manoeuvring space aid safety and control.

Once the subject takes to the motorway, another unit acts as ‘feeder’ by taking a slip road in plain sight. The subject “takes the feed” and stays on the motorway to avoid him. Then the feeder immediately rejoins via the on-ramp, becoming

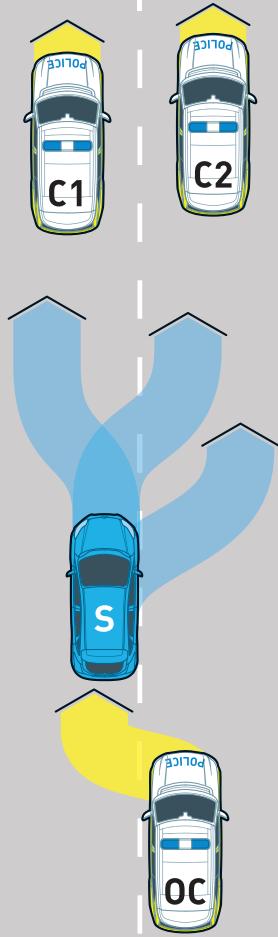
‘safety car’ to focus on civilian welfare. If the subject fails to stop when prompted, the control room may choose to authorise pursuit tactics. At this stage, the first patrol car (ideally carrying one officer to use the radio and one to drive) assumes control as operations commander (“ops comm”), and a pursuit begins.

The meat of our day is spent on a closed track at RAF Leuchars (busy home to two Eurofighter Typhoon squadrons and plenty of chilling, Cold-War-evoking sirens). For PCs John Quither, Andy Walls and Gavin Jack, it’s a chance to develop their containment skills in a safe environment. All three students are active officers and alumni of Police Scotland’s advanced driver training.

The first exercise helps them

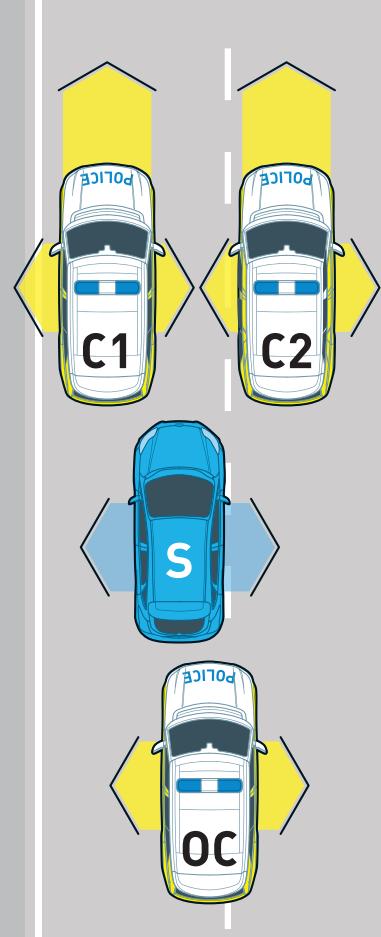
break the habit of keeping a distance. A column of three vehicles, with Reid’s subject car in the middle, does lengths of the straight. The rearmost driver learns to latch on to the subject’s rear bumper as gently and squarely as possible. The foremost driver should barely feel the nudge of connection from behind, and then uses his brakes to bring the column to a halt as ops comm calls out “slow, slow, slow” three times and then “stop, stop, stop”. Then it’s handbrake and footbrake on so the subject can’t shunt a gap open.

All this happens at no more than 20mph, but it might as well be 100mph; it’s minimising the speed differential between cars that’s paramount. Momentum exchange must be kept to a minimum to preserve stability. Push the subject

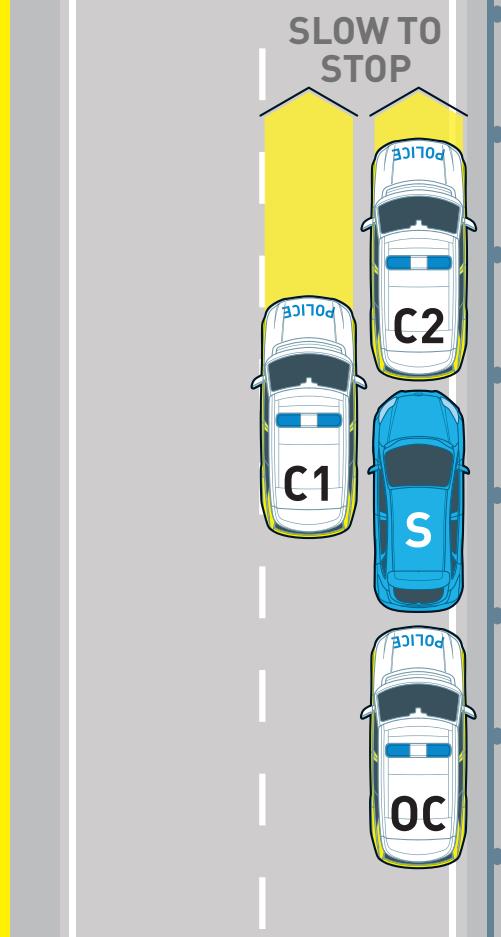


Having broken away from the rolling roadblock that they instigated, C1 and C2 have a clear carriageway ahead as the subject approaches from behind. OC half-shadows the subject at a bonnet length's distance.

Key: C1 = containment car 1. C2 = containment car 2. OC = operations commander. S = subject car



When the subject gets close, C1 shadows him, watching his hands in the rear-view mirror for guidance. C2 stays parallel, taking his mark from C1. C1 and C2 mustn't brake; speed is constant. OC still half-shadows the subject.



The subject 'commits' to C2; C1 drops back to close any forward gap while protecting his steering axle. OC engages the subject from the rear and then co-ordinates slowing to a stop via the radio.



Officers practise at RAF Leuchars before trying it on the road



Minimising the speed differential is vital, says Sgt Reid

too hard and it's easy to roll off his bumper and induce a spin. Brake too hard and noses can wedge below tailgates, lightening rear axles and inducing violent fish-tailing.

The subsequent 'brake and react' exercise sees one driver staggered alongside another. The first performs an emergency stop from 50mph and the second must copy it immediately, but usually shoots by, halting around 10m in front. It shows the importance of gentle changes in speed.

Then the instructors park the cars as they would be at the conclusion of containment. The three vehicles in a column are touching, while the flanking car sits inches to one side. The students take a good look. Then it's their turn to try containment, as detailed by our illustrations. From the back seat of containment car one, I can see that driver Walls's eyes are like dinner plates in the rear-view mirror. Training this may be, but it's real-world intense. By the end of the week, he'll be doing these manoeuvres on public roads and will develop the same calmness that Faulds showed this morning. While Price and I bubble with excitement – he says the day has been more thrilling than 200mph-plus in a Veyron – the police professionals are experts at taking the drama, and the danger, out of such extreme situations. □

THE CARS THAT FIT THE BILL



THE DAY'S TRAINING vehicles are all turbocharged petrol Volvo V70s good for 150mph-plus: four front-drive Mk2 T5s of about 250bhp and a variable four-wheel-drive Mk3 T6 producing 281bhp. They're Geartronic autos but stay in manual mode for best control.

With three passengers and patrol kit, they'd near their weight limit but are fit for purpose without mechanical modification, save for heavy-duty brakes. They have been chosen from retirement-ready police fleets – even the youngest has 124,000 miles on the clock – but they seem remarkably fresh.

Audi A4 and A6 Avants are also favoured. The priorities are a big, accessible boot, sturdiness, reliability and comfort. Both petrols and diesels are used. Officers are all-weather trained, so winter tyres are vetoed in favour of high-speed stability, while rear-drivers lack inclement performance.

High-riding police cars like the BMW X5 or Mitsubishi Shogun can be helpful when pursuing other large vehicles, but road-rally-hero Subaru Imprezas and Mitsubishi Echos are hampered by limited range and bucket seats that don't accommodate body armour.