

Goodbye, bread truck

Yuma Police Department Detective Greg Counts won't ever have to worry about getting "Bread Truck" duty anymore. Nor, for that matter, will any other member of YPD's Special Enforcement Team.



Yuma police Detective Greg Counts sits in the department's new armored truck's turret as he demonstrates its spinning capability to media on Thursday.

The "Bread Truck" as it is known in the department, refers to the unit's 1979 GMC armored car the team has been using since 1990 to haul members of SET to hostage situations, armed stand-offs and other crime scenes which require special weapons and tactics.

The vehicle is notorious for its inadequately air-conditioned interior and many breakdowns. Team members still snicker about its delivery truck like appearance.

"It was tough," Counts said. "It was always a question of dependability. Is it going to start today? Did you charge the battery last week? Somebody had to leave an hour before just to make sure it was running. And whoever got the job was like 'Ugh! I have to take the bread truck?'"

Now, thanks to a \$216,000 terrorism grant from the Department of Homeland Security, the department is retiring the "Bread Truck" and replacing it with a **Lenco BearCat** armored response and rescue vehicle.

The brand new state-of-the-art vehicle features an armored exterior capable of repelling multiple hits from an assault rifle, blast protection from explosions, bulletproof glass and tires, a rotating roof hatch turret and plenty of space to store their gear.

It's also air-conditioned, has a tighter turning radius, holds up to 10 personnel and is capable of speeds up to 85 miles an hour, not to mention other luxuries such as power steering, power brakes and four-wheel drive.

Lt. John Lekan said the difference is like night and day. "It's a big improvement for us," Lekan said. "We are really excited. We feel very fortunate we had the opportunity to receive this."

YPD worked with Pima County, which makes up the Southern Arizona Homeland Security Region, back in March 2005 to get the money for the vehicle.

Lekan said officers visited the Long Beach, Calif., Police Department which had one of the vehicles and tested it and liked what they saw. Lenco is the nation's leading designer and manufacturer of armored security vehicles.



The Yuma Police Department's new Special Enforcement Unit armored vehicle sits in front of the old vehicle on Thursday at the department's parking lot. PHOTO BY JACOB LOPEZ/THE SUN

The new vehicle can be used in anything from high-risk search warrant situations to rescuing a citizen in a hostage situation. "It allows us to get our officers in and get people out," Lekan said. "Thankfully, we don't get called out a lot. But we have to be prepared to get called out in a moment's notice and we have to be able to bring in all of our tools and special equipment."

The old vehicle is simply too small to carry team members and all of their equipment. Counts said the department had to rent U-Haul vans to transport the team and equipment. "It's exactly what we needed," Counts said. "Now we won't have to rent anything."