

Salem Police Department housing armored vehicle on behalf of ILEAS Lenco BearCat available to 33 southern Illinois counties



(Photo by Brandi Spelbring) Sergeant Jeff Mount of the Salem Police Department shows off the new Lenco BearCat police rescue vehicle being housed for ILEAS by SPD.

The Lenco BearCat is an armored vehicle that is being housed in Salem. It is one of nine of these types of vehicles to come to the state through a Homeland Security grant. The \$225,000 vehicle is already being used by the military and for tactical operations in Iraq and is now showing up on the home front all across the country.

The Lenco Bearcat was awarded to Salem for housing because SPD Chief Ron Campo is also the commander of the ILEAS Special Response Team for Weapons of Mass Destruction. The team consists of 23 specially trained members who are able to operate the Lenco BearCat in a 33-county area in the southern part of the state. The state is divided into 11 ILEAS regions, and the team covers Regions 9 and 11, consisting of a total of 33 counties. If any problems arise in those counties, the Bearcat is available to them.

The BearCat was put to the test last Friday during an hour-long standoff with a 65-year-old Salem man when he allegedly fired on Marion County sheriff's deputies, who then returned fire. The loud speaker system featured in the vehicle was used to try and convince the man to surrender to deputies.

"Before the Bearcat, we would arrive on scene in cars that don't provide protection," said Campo, "We can get a lot closer now without being in danger."

The Lenco company claims that the BearCat can be used for high risk warrants, officer rescue, tactical EMS, rapid deployment of up to 10 officers, gang intervention, group evacuation, riot situations, and other tactics.

The BearCat can be utilized for a variety of operations but, most importantly, the BearCat helps protect officers from harm during volatile situations. The truck is built from a thick, heavy metal that prevents bullets from entering the interior. Every inch is covered thoroughly - even the door hinges have extra thick metal to prevent any areas of vulnerability.

"You won't be hurt if you're inside this thing," Sergeant Jeff Mount explained, "It would take many multiple hits before anything could possibly get through."

It's almost like driving a tank," said Sgt. Jeff Mount of the Salem PD about the new Lenco BearCat. Salem PD showed off the newest addition to the Illinois Law Enforcement Alarm System (ILEAS) vehicle fleet on Monday.

Mount, a member of the ILEAS special team, is responsible for keeping the truck in perfect operating condition. Mount stressed the capability for this truck to be used as a rescue vehicle.

"If an officer is down, we can get right in there and pick them up and then get right back out," he explained.

While safety is the main feature, the design also permits for weapons to be used through the gun barrel holes and allows for cover fire from a turret. The gun barrel holes are placed strategically on the back and sides of the vehicle, in the event that return fire is necessary.

The Lenco company, based in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, developed the 19,000-pound BearCat on a Ford F-550 chassis platform, which allows for warranty covered repairs, maintenance service, and parts replacements on the vehicle chassis.

The BearCat is armored with Mil-Spec armor plate certified to defeat multi-hit attacks from Armor Piercing Ammo while the ceiling and floors provide enhanced blast and fragmentation protection. The ballistic glass windows offer the same multi-hit defeat, as well as providing clarity and well-designed peripheral visibility. The 6.0L diesel engine BearCat is equipped with Run-Flat tires, remote controlled spotlights, radio systems, bullhorn, inverter, and a 16-1/2 ton winch on the front. In the case of a riot situation, inside locks will safely enclose officers away from injury. Radiation and gas detectors alert officers to dangerous levels of each.

Salem also houses a home command center vehicle, making a total of \$1 million in ILEAS equipment being housed locally. The equipment can be used by any of the departments in Regions 9 and 11. In the event that a Salem officer needs to take one of the vehicles to another county for use, that officer's time is reimbursed by ILEAS, costing local taxpayers nothing.



(Staff Photo by Brandi Spelbring) The Lenco BearCat is designed with safety as the key factor. The vehicle will provide an elevated level of protection that did not exist with only police cars on scene. The vehicle will be housed by the Salem Police Department, but is accessible to all departments in Regions 9 and 11 of ILEAS, a total of 33 counties