

By Rod Thompson  
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## BearCat Alights

Homeland Security money lets police on the Big Island get a big armored vehicle



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Hawaii County Police Acting Lt. Sam Kawamoto shows off the new BearCat armored vehicle obtained by Big Island police with a grant from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

The BearCat is built by **Lenco Industries Inc.** of Pittsfield, Mass., on a modified Ford truck chassis, Kawamoto said.

The four-wheel-drive, diesel engine vehicle carries the driver, a front seat passenger and eight people in the back. It features a hatch in the roof, in which the bullet-proof lid serves as a shield. It also has radiation and methane gas detectors on board.

Kawamoto said the vehicle is used mostly in executing high-risk search warrants.

The team, consisting of a full-time lieutenant and sergeant and specially trained officers around the island, deploys with four vehicles.

**HILO** » The Hawaii County Police Department showed off its new Lenco BearCat yesterday, a 19,000-pound armored vehicle to be used by the Special Response Team in high-risk missions.

The department purchased the vehicle in July with a \$244,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Acting Lt. Sam Kawamoto, head of the response team, said the unit has been deployed 64 times since it was created in 1999. On previous missions the unit responded in a regular four-wheel-drive van, he said.

"When you're driving up to a house where there are shots fired, do you feel safe in a panel van? I don't," he said.

Besides the BearCat, a mobile command post, a transport vehicle adapted from an ambulance, and a panel truck are dispatched together on missions, Kawamoto said.

The mobile command post was obtained by the department in 2004 with a \$330,899 grant from Homeland Security.

Hawaii County police are the first in the state to use the Homeland Security money for an armored vehicle. Hawaii County and Honolulu police have borrowed military armored vehicles in the past.