

AUSTRALIA'S FIRST POLICE HELICOPTER



A breakthrough in crime prevention...



Polair observer Constable Bob Depeau (left) and pilot Constable Alan Edwards after completing a patrol.

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The police helicopter skidded over

The police helicopter skidded over the top of the Sydney Harbour Bridge and banked steeply above the north shore suburb of Kirribilli. Five minutes before and 13 kilometres away, the crew had received word that two men had broken into and robbed a Kirribilli flat. Now the helicopter hovered over the burgled building.

"Polair One," the radio call sign for Australia's first police helicopter, hung in the air for a few moments before beginning a systematic search of the tangled streets below. We spotted a vehicle matching the description of one reported leaving the robbed apartment.

The helicopter's observer, Vietnam veteran Constable Bob Depeau, radioed the vehicle's position and two minutes later a patrol car reached the scene. We watched the police car close in, and then we headed off again on general patrol with Constable Depeau and pilot Alan Edwards eager to put the brand new \$300,000 craft through its aerial paces.

The NSW Police Department's Air Wing was only recently formed and it took possession of Polair One in May. Victoria's police air wing is expecting its

Victoria's police air wing is expecting its first helicopter in August.

The Wing's chief pilot, Constable



Bob Depeau watches over the suburbs from Polair.

Pictures Craig Lamotte.

Edwards, was recruited from Sydney's Wales Helicopter Rescue Service.

"I joined the Police Air Wing because it's a challenge," he said.

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Constable Edwards, who did the helicopter stunt flying in the TV series "Chopper Squad," described Polair as "an excellent backup for the normal police role on the ground."

Constable Depeau explained that the helicopter was perfect for tracking down stolen vehicles, and, while flying over the heavily wooded Ku-ring-gai National Park on Sydney's northern outskirts, we saw dozens of gutted and burnt out cars abandoned on bush tracks.

The Bell Ranger 111 helicopter is fitted with search and rescue equipment and a sophisticated on-board computer for instant flight details.

Included in the helicopter's special equipment is a 30 million candlepower searchlight slotted under the craft's nose. The beam can light up a football field from 600 metres and the light can be narrowed to an 18-metre radius.

Recently Polair was called out at night to help hunt down an escapee from a Sydney prison. A man had been seen going over the jail wall.

Polair One and its eerie searchlight, making the craft look like an Unidentified Flying Object, cluttered over the prison

Flying Object, clattered over the prison. Suddenly the "escapee" was sighted — he was a jail warder who had hopped over the wall to retrieve a tennis ball.

According to the officer in charge of the Wing, Senior Inspector Frank Smith, the helicopter is an "invaluable aid for crime prevention.

"We plan to have regular helicopter patrols over high crime areas," he said.

— GREG FLYNN