

# New recruits put best paw forward

By Jacinda Brown, Media and Public Affairs Branch



Photo by Adelle O'Donnell, Media and Public Affairs Branch.

Sergeant Dean Hansen, Police Dog Instructor introduces Minister for Police and Corrective Services Judy Spence to one of the recruit police dogs during the opening of the new Police Dog Development Complex.

The Queensland Police Service (QPS) has welcomed seven new recruits of the four-legged kind with the opening of the Police Dog Development Complex at the Dog Squad, Oxley.

Minister for Police and Corrective Services Judy Spence recently opened the kennels, which were developed due to a shortage of quality dogs being donated to the QPS.

Police Dog Instructor Sergeant Dean Hansen said in the past the Dog Squad had advertised in newspapers and on television for the donation of dogs and could receive up to 100 responses from the public at a time.

Sergeant Hansen said out of those replies, the squad would consider testing 10 to 15 dogs, however, at times only one dog would be suitable to be recruited.

Senior Sergeant Pat Collins, Officer in Charge, Brisbane Dog Squad said the shortage of suitable dogs was because those offered were aged from one to two years and had acquired behavioural traits not appropriate for a police dog.

The QPS found the most cost effective way to ensure an ongoing supply of quality dogs was to buy purpose-bred German and Belgian Shepherd puppies and train them to become police dogs. There will, on occasion, also be Labradors trained there.

Senior Sergeant Collins said only through extensive training would puppies and young dogs develop the correct behavioural traits and temperament to become a police dog.

In March 2004, the QPS received funding to build the centre, which will house the puppies throughout their training.

The Dog Squad accepts puppies from eight weeks of age. At the age of 15 months, the puppies will be partnered with a handler and begin to develop their work drives.

Dog/handler teams will play ball games to motivate the puppies to chase and retrieve, and play tug-of-war to develop their grip and bite.

During this time, the puppies are also socialised with their surrounding area.

Senior Sergeant Collins said handlers exposed the puppies to high traffic areas such as bus and train stations and shopping centres so they could be confident when they began their working lives.

Between the ages of 17 and 18 months the puppies will undertake the final stages of their training.

Sergeant Hansen said that by having the puppies participate in the 14-week training course, they would be taught the foundations to their future role as general purpose police dogs.

The puppies will be taught to track missing people and trace offenders who have left scenes of crimes.

They are also taught obedience, agility, how to apprehend an offender and protect their handler, as well as search vegetation for hidden property.

Sergeant Hansen said there were a number of reasons as to why the QPS chose particular breeds.

“German and Belgian Shepherds are chosen because they are a large dog and are aggressive on the job. If they are threatened they are willing to stand up for themselves and apprehend an offender. They



Sergeant Dean Hansen and a dog recruit demonstrate grip manoeuvres as taught to the animals during their initial dog training at the complex.

have good sensitive noses and are easily trained. They are a good all-round dog,” he said.

Sergeant Hansen said Labradors were selected as drug and explosive detection dogs as offenders were more willing to allow the dogs to search them as the dogs were not aggressive or intimidating.

A police dog generally will work with the same handler for the entirety of its career.

However, the dog/handler relationship does not end there.

When a police dog retires after a career of about eight to nine years, they will continue to live their handler as a pet.

Currently, there are 67 dog/handler teams throughout the State.



Commissioner Bob Atkinson and Minister for Public Works, Housing and Racing Robert Swarten watch on as Minister for Police and Corrective Services Judy Spence unveils the plaque to officially open the Police Dog Development Complex.