



Sussex Police Put Toyotas on the Beat

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Twenty-two Toyota Avensis 1.6S four-door saloons have been recruited by Sussex Police for duty as beat cars. They join a fleet of 720 vehicles, until now mostly Peugeots, and their numbers are set to increase if a six-month evaluation proves successful.

Sussex Police has been trying out demonstrators from most of the major manufacturers, but an Avensis that joined the force three months ago has gone down particularly well: "Our officers were over the moon, and I was well pleased with it," says Fleet Manager Jeff Fox, who is based in Lewes.

The first of the 22 vehicles go on patrol from stations around the county this month and will be kept under close observation: "We can find out more about a car in six months than most people can in four years," says Jeff.

The police will be looking for reliability, performance and value for money, because the cars must be capable of reaching the site of any 999 call within minutes. At the same time the possibility of accidents with sometimes fast-moving vehicles has to be allowed for, and it was felt that downsizing in engine capacity might reduce some of that risk.

"We run a lot of Peugeot 306s and 406s and it was only right that we try something else," says Jeff Fox. "We wanted to reduce the power output and the Avensis 1.6 seemed to fit the bill. It also compared favourably with other makes on replacement of parts, including wings, bonnets and bumpers, and on service and warranty conditions."

The nature of their duties means that police cars have special requirements. "We need good headroom and seating for the PCs, who tend to be tall and spend a lot of their time in the vehicles, and we also require plenty of space for kit in the boot," says Jeff. "The Avensis meets those needs with flying colours.

"The 1.6 is also quite economical. We're spending public money, so we have to be seen not to overspecify, but because the cars are driven really hard they do have to be resilient. They could easily do over 90,000 miles in three years."

Toyota has fitted out the cars to police specifications, including wiring for radio gear, sirens and beacons, and rewired rear locks and windows so that they are operable only from the front. Five of the vehicles have been provided with extra lumbar support on both front seats; this is seen as a possible area for legislation in the future.

Maintenance and repairs will be carried out by police workshop staff, who have already

attended Toyota familiarisation courses. And they have now helped to kit out an Avensis to police spec as a demonstrator for other forces around the country. "When they're striped up and fitted with light bars and so on they do look quite smart," says Jeff Fox. "So far the Avensis appears to be a good value-for-money package."

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