

Police ride bikes to catch burglars

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STAFF WRITER

Watsonville policemen last month took a new approach to fighting crime, one that got them sore muscles and 23 arrests.

For the last two weeks, the bicycle has been the preferred mode of transportation for officers trying to fight a growing rash of car burglaries in the downtown area.

"I kept reading the daily bulletin and seeing all those auto burglaries," Police Capt. Terry Medina said. "We had increased our patrols, but there were a lot of young people out there who were really bold."

Starting March 21, every night from Thursday through Sunday, about 12 officers, cadets and reserves scattered around the area between Riverside Drive and Freedom Boulevard. Some were on bicycles, some on foot and some in unmarked cars.

In addition to making 12 felony arrests and six misdemeanor arrests, the officers on the auto burglary task force arrested five people for being drunk in public.

"The (drunk in public) arrests were guys known to us as being capable of committing a crime," Medina said.

"Instead of hanging around waiting for them to commit a crime, we arrested them for being drunk — the object is to prevent crimes from happening, right?"

Medina said the police had alerted the district attorney's office about Watsonville's auto burglary problem.

"You can't ask them to keep people, especially juveniles, in jail for a long time," Medina said. "But you can make their probation severe enough to stop this activity."

The police captain said he doubted the police would resort to bicycles in the future because of limited manpower. But, he said, the officers hope to dream up more creative — and more comfortable — ways of covering their beats.

"It was freezing cold and we didn't have great bicycles," Medina said. "And some of the guys couldn't walk after the first night; they complained, but it was good-natured."



Sam Vestal

Chief Ray Belgard shows off one of the bikes used by his officers on the special downtown patrol.