

Watsonville puts cops on bikes

By GREG BEEBE

Sentinel staff writer

WATSONVILLE — It didn't take long for the city's Police Department to reap the benefits of its new bike patrols.

The city unveiled its police-on-bikes during last weekend's annual Beach Street Revival car show and rally. While a patrol car would have been mired in the weekend's traditional cruiser traffic jams, the biking officers were able to smoothly maneuver through the gridlock.

"They were worth their weight in gold at the Beach Street Revival," said Sgt. Manny Solano.

Ordinarily, the city will deploy two officers on bikes downtown from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. daily.

The two-wheeled patrols increase police visibility and foster more contact with the public, said Lt. George Cursi.

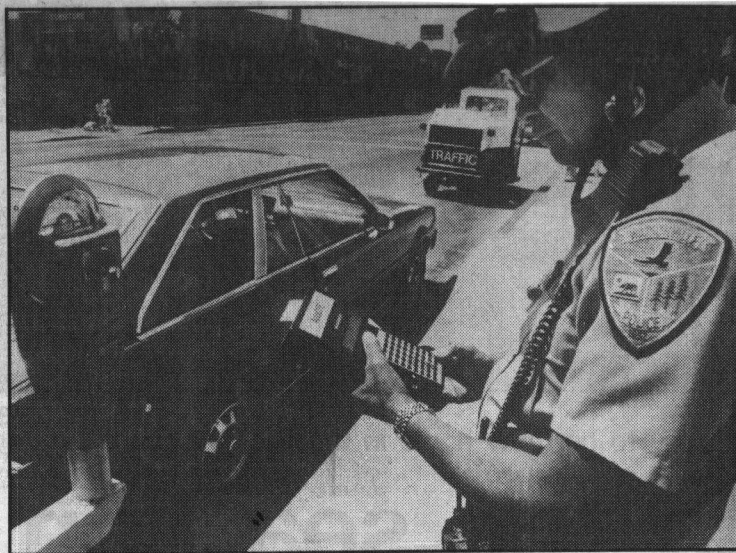
"We're into community policing and we thought this would be a good way to get officers out there where they're coming into contact with downtown business owners and residents," said Cursi. "They're a little more visible on the bikes and also there's the aspect of getting around tight spots."

The bikes also give officers a chance to distribute crime prevention pamphlets and social-service referrals, said Solano. And the switch from patrol cars is a nice "change of pace" for the officers, said Solano.

Another advantage — during these tight budgetary times — is the city was able to start the new patrols virtually without additional cost.

Supplies and services were donated by the new Kmart store on Freedom Boulevard, Large's Metal Fabrication shop on Pine Street, and the new cooperative bike-shop venture at the Watsonville Goodwill store that employs at-risk youth as bicycle repair apprentices.

The mountain bikes the officers ride came from the Police Department's stock of recovered, but unclaimed stolen property. The officers wear dark blue shorts, blue shirts — and helmets, said Cursi.



Traffic control officer Leigh Sakaguchi uses hand-held computer to dispense parking tickets.

Computer-age parking tickets

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WATSONVILLE — Parking enforcement officers here have joined the computer age.

This month, the city's meter man and meter woman began "writing" parking tickets via computers. The two hand-held devices, weighing less than two pounds, are preprogrammed with the city's parking violations and bails, makes and models of cars and various locations.

By "pushing a couple of buttons," parking control officers can log the violation, then generate a ticket through the computer's small printer, said WPD Sgt. Chris Gallagher.

Perhaps the best thing about the ticket machines, said Gallagher, is that it eliminates penmanship from the parking-ticket mix.

A ticket written by hand takes a lot of time, and they're sometimes hard to read, he said.

Under the old procedure, hand-written tickets were forwarded to dispatchers, who logged the violations into a computer by hand. The new machines store the violations — as many as 300 a day, although Gallagher said officers here never write that many — and the citations are downloaded into a personal computer at the end of the day.

Once in the personal computer, the viola-

tions are transferred electronically to a Berkeley company, Ticket Enforcement Technology, that administers the city's parking tickets.

"It's a pretty sophisticated thing — we don't have to do all that entry, and spend all the time that it takes to go out and write a ticket," Gallagher said.

Under the old procedure, it cost the city \$1.50 to process each ticket; computerization reduced that to \$1, said Cursi. The city leases its two ticket computers for \$100 a month.

Regular patrol officers write a few tickets every once in awhile, and those also will be sent to Berkeley for processing.

Gallagher said the city is preparing to add another innovation to its parking enforcement arsenal: the infamous "Denver boot," a device already in use by the city of Santa Cruz.

Currently, cars with multiple unpaid parking tickets eventually get towed, at the city's expense.

The locking boot, which cradles and immobilizes an offending auto's wheel, "is a real visible thing," said Gallagher. "It kind of reminds other people" about what happens when parking tickets — whether hand-written or computer-driven — are ignored, he said.

High- and low-tech policing



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel photos

Watsonville police officers Jess Ojeda and Joe Clarke cruise Main Street on patrol bikes Wednesday.