

Best Of

COPSWESTTM

2009 WINNER

Best Specialty Vehicle **Arroyo Grande Police Department**



Number of sworn officers: 26

Number of non-sworn: 8

The Arroyo Grande Police Department identified a clear and immediate need for a multi-purpose vehicle designed to provide public safety communications while at the same time providing transportation and tactical support for officers during critical incidents. Despite its geographic and population size and the number of police agencies, none of the local law enforcement agencies in San Luis Obispo County had such a self-propelled vehicle. Once the need became evident, the Department began a creative search for a vehicle that could provide such a full spectrum of services while at the same time not overburden an already severely restrictive budget. The response to what was once perceived



as a difficult task was discovered in a local resource as the Cambria Healthcare District stepped forward with a partial donation of a retired ambulance.

To gain a better understanding of the evolution of the Arroyo Grande Police Department specialty vehicle, nicknamed by the officers who regularly use it as the MERV or the Mobile Emergency Response Vehicle, you really have to view the photographs of the original vehicle that ultimately morphed into the MERV. The transformation of the retired 1995 Ford E 350 diesel-powered ambulance into the MERV is truly a creative and technological masterpiece accomplished by a multitude of private companies and individuals and countless volunteer hours donated by talented members of the Arroyo Grande Police Department.

The ambulance body was raised on its chassis, outfitted with oversize off-road tires, and painted in a black and white paint scheme with identifying decals consistent with the entire patrol vehicle fleet. The original turbo-charged diesel engine was modified to significantly increase its horsepower. A side roll-out awning was attached. The roof gained a reinforced platform capable of supporting the weight of several officers. Three 20-million candle power lights, one mounted on a remote-controlled revolving turret, were attached to the front of the MERV, giving officers the



tactical advantage of turning night into virtual daylight with the flick of a switch. An oversized powder-coated front brush bumper with a 15,000 pound capacity winch completed the major changes to the vehicle exterior.

The vehicle interior underwent a similar major evolution. The cabinets that once housed medical supplies and equipment were modified to accommodate police equipment used during special operations. Several police radio systems vital for emergency communications were installed in a console, along with a moveable platform for a laptop computer adjacent to the radio console, all critical pieces of equipment for a special operation or special event.

What was once an aging ambulance emerged from its cocoon as a fully equipped special response vehicle capable of transporting a squad of officers to a special operation or special event while providing public safety communications and tactical support for that squad of officers.

What changeover company did you work with?

The list of companies and individuals involved in the retired ambulance transition is extensive and varied and in addition to Cambria Healthcare District in Cambria, California includes Sierra Auto Body Shop in Graver Beach, California; Cast Products, Inc. in Athens, Alabama; Yellow Sub Studios in Arroyo Grande, California; Buckstop Bumpers in Newberg, Oregon; Next Day Signs in Santa Maria, California; V & M Upholstery in Oceano, California; J's Tire & Auto Center in Santa Maria, California; Frank Dalcerra in Arroyo Grande, California; Rock Solid in Paso Robles, California; Adamson Police Products in Los Alamitos, California; Brumit Diesel in Santa Maria, California; Nick's Telecom in Nipomo, California; and John Hayashi Irrigation West in Arroyo Grande, California.

What special equipment was added:

The special equipment added to the vehicle is as varied as the vendors involved. The major pieces of special equipment include the overhead lights, the roof platform, the oversized tires, the front brush bumper, the front winch, and the radio equipment and console inside the vehicle.