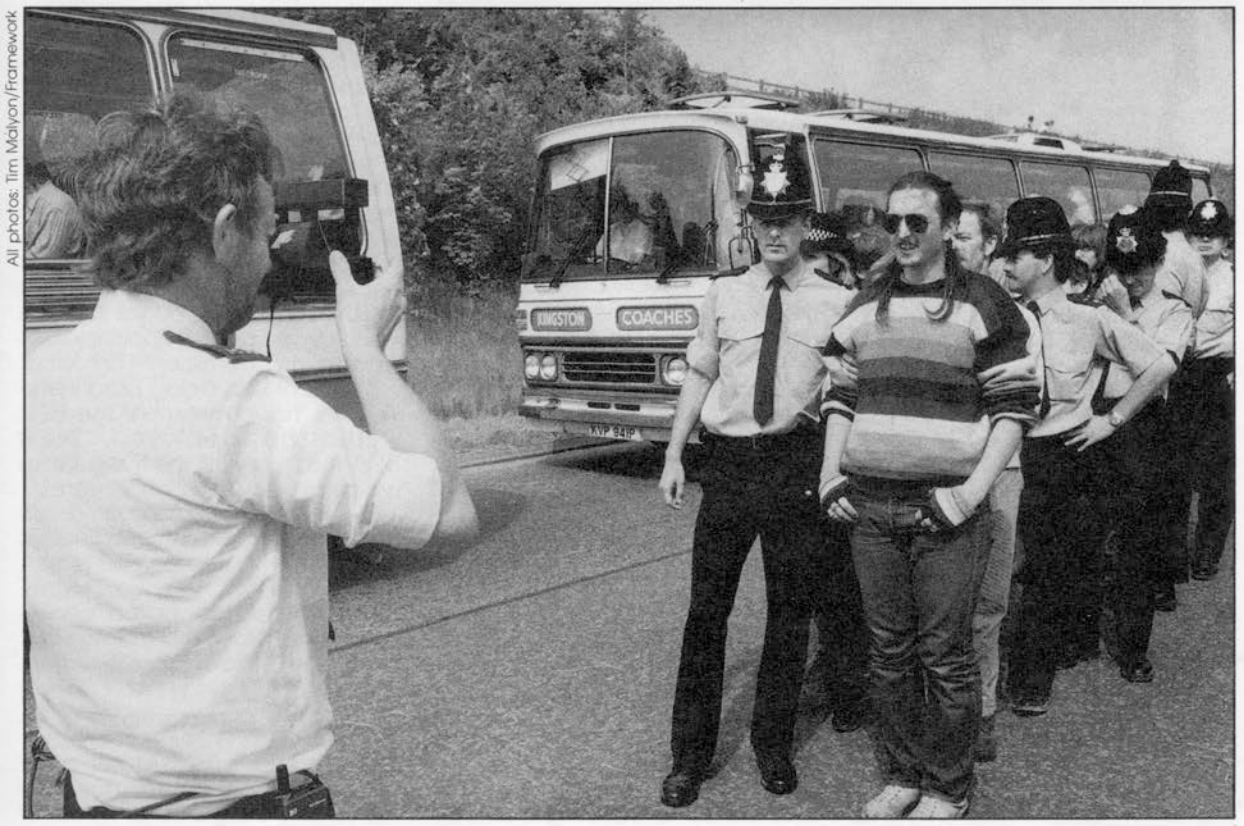
SMILE PLEASE, YOU'RE NICKED

All photos: Tim Malyon/Framework



Coach-party of Stonehenge demonstrators line-up with their arresting officers for a souvenir photograph

Press photographer Tim Malyon expresses concern about the latest in police surveillance technology

On 20th June solstice eve, police arrested over 200 Stonehenge demonstrators for obstruction on the A36 near Salisbury. Prisoners were lined up with their arresting officers and Polaroid snaps taken of the happy couples.

The purpose, as explained by the police press officer at the scene was, "to identify the police officer with the prisoner", a practise now widespread amongst UK forces. Most people faced the birdie, although one certainly resisted.

Before introduction of this procedure cases have come to court, for instance during the miners' strike, where the wrong arresting officer was attached to the wrong defendant. Now officers are given the snaps in public order situations where multiple arrests are made and confusion could arise. Full details of prisoners and photographs for the Criminal Records file are then taken after the incident.

The police are empowered in such circumstances by *The Police And Criminal Evidence Act* to take photographs, which must be destroyed if the subject is subsequently released without charge or found not guilty in court. Subjects may witness destruction of their photograph. This same act states, without exception, that "force may not be used to take a photograph".

Also on show this June, watching hopeful Stonehenge punters, was the Public Order Surveillance Vehicle (POSV). Deployed initially to detect football hooligans, hence its 'hooly van' nickname, it is a Ford Transit van specially equipped for surveillance, identification, intelligence, training, debriefing and evidence collection. A tripod mounted camera, the Evidence Gathering Camera (EGC), is being developed using similar technology.

At the heart of both systems is a video camera which looks through

A Public Order Surveillance Vehicle (POSV), known as 'the hooly van'

a still camera viewfinder. The operator therefore, can observe and film continuous action, shooting still – of far higher quality than stills generated from video – whenever the occasion demands it.

"The video is looking through the stills camera viewfinder, seeing exactly the same image, and provides contextual material against which the still photograph can be compared", explained Andy Ford, the system's inventor and designer, who is employed by The Home Office Scientific Research and Development Branch.

Only three 'hooly vans' have so far been produced, now on loan to the Metropolitan, West Midlands and Greater Manchester Police, and two EGC units. If commercially produced the POSV may sell for around £60,000, exclusive of van cost, although no decision has yet been taken on marketing either of the systems. Andy Ford reckons they are the most sophisticated of their kind in existence.

The van's periscope contains two video cameras with corresponding display screens, recorders and controls in the vehicle. One covers a wide angle of action while the other looks through a Nikon 300mm f2.8 lens with 2X converter on an F3 body with MD4 motordrive and MF4 250-exposure back. The camera is set on automatic and aperture selection and focusing are both motorised and remotely controlled.

A crucial accessory is the Davin Modulux 130 light intensifier, a design originally developed by the Home Office some ten years ago, then produced and marketed by David Optical Ltd (price around £5,000). In Northern Ireland the Modulux 130 is reported to have identified and photographed a moving suspect under low street lighting at 350 metres through a Nikon 2,000mm f11 lens. The POSV with 300mm f2.8 is two stops faster with the 2X converter fitted. Amplifying ambient light by a factor of at least 100,000X, the Modulux can operate down to starlight without resort to infra red lighting.

Where the 'hooly' uses a Nikon principally for its optics and 250-exposure back, the EGC uses a Canon FIn with MA motordrive, FN100 film back, 150-600mm f5.6 zoom lens, optional 2X converter and the same Davin light intensifier. Zoom, aperture selection and focusing are all motorised and remote controlled.

Canon was chosen over Nikon for the EGC largely because of greater ease in motorising the zoom and adapting the viewfinder display to indicate aperture, focal length, shutter speed, frame counter and battery voltage. A zoom lens was crucial for the EGC since only one video camera is incorporated within the system, looking through the still camera lens, and with no separate wide-angle video as in the POSV. The zoom lens must therefore furnish wide context for the long shots. Mounted on a Gitzo tripod with controls built into the tripod arms, the 4ft long EGC requires two people to carry it, "unless you're Frank Bruno", commented Andy Ford wryly.

Deployment of the London Metropolitan Police 'hooly van' in Wiltshire this June, snapping sun-worshippers, was a new departure from its football surveillance role, one which conforms with the Home Office's original intent in developing the equipment. "Development of this equipment followed the 1981 riots," a Home Office spokesperson said. "That was when it was first looked at. Obviously it could have a role to play in the policing of riots and other serious disorders."

West Midlands police also recently announced they are drafting unmarked observation vehicles into high crime areas, a decision immediately condemned by the National Council for Civil Liberties. A police spokesperson refused to comment on what equipment was being used in the vehicles nor on whether the EGC would be deployed. West Midlands is one of the three forces which already uses 'hooly vans'.

Lest surveillance paranoia run rampant one recent imaginative press report should be laid to rest. The POSV is not, Andy Ford states, directly linked to police photography files. Nor is there computerised identification of faces between van and the Criminal Records Office.

Computer Weekly journalist Jonathan Green-Armytage says: "You'd be hard-pressed to build this up into a big brother system of identification. Transmitting images is no problem, storing them electronically is no problem, although a bit expensive, but fast retrieval from a big file of images is a bit of a problem, and matching images one against another is a massive problem."

Surveillance technology frightens me, partly because it may be acquired by undesirable third parties, and also because there are only two checks on police use of it. The first is the woolly guidelines issued by the Home Office to chief constables, which forbid 'any unwarrantable intrusion of privacy', and require that surveillance records, including photographs, 'shall normally only be retained where necessary'.

The second, yet feebler check, is what a journalist is told and can discover. Personally, I'm uneasy.