

Safety Representatives report .

Assault on Police - 10th June 2017 -South Wales Police area.

The following is the report from the assaulted officer and his concerns about the cage in the new long wheel base Mercedes Sprinter van currently being issued.

Officer report

"I write this report in relation to the inadequacy of the new Mercedes Sprinter van, CN17 EUB.

When we recently received this van, it was generally felt that the cage was far too small and would possibly be a problem when dealing with someone aggressive. Unfortunately, this came to fruition this Saturday when I was assaulted by a drunken female kicking me in the face. The female had been arrested for Drunk & Disorderly outside the pub. However, she actively resisted being arrested and, even though she was handcuffed to the rear, it was almost impossible to get her in to the cage. Whilst struggling with her she kicked out and her foot caught me on the right side of my jaw. Luckily, she was bare footed at that stage as she had earlier been wearing stiletto heels.

Eventually, we only managed to get the female in to the cage because PC EM went inside the van and opened the interior door to the cage. She was then able to pull the female in to the cage from inside. The female was subsequently further arrested for Assault Police.

I believe this assault wouldn't have occurred if we'd had a larger cage like we used to as it would have been a lot easier to place the female inside even whilst struggling.

Whilst at Cardiff Bay Custody Suite a Cardiff officer approached me and said he'd seen that I had one of the new vans. Without being prompted, the officer then said he believed the cages were far too small and they'd had numerous problems placing drunken prisoners inside.

It appears that this problem is being experienced by other divisions as well. I don't know what, if anything, can be done about this but I felt I must bring this to your attention.

Submitted for your information, PC RM."

Additional

On speaking with the officer what isn't clear from his report is the position of the detainee when she assaulted him and that she actually kicked him twice.

In the first assault, she was climbing up the step into the back and being pushed by the officer when she kicked out behind her and caught him in

In the second assault, she was sat on the bench inside the cage and kicked out from the bench.

Observations and safety implications

Firstly, it has to be said that the new Mercedes Sprinter Van, very much like the old ones are a joy to drive when you consider the Vauxhall vans that we currently have for PSU duties in SWP. The Mercedes win hands down. The issues raised in this report are solely concerned with the additional fitments in the van.

However, before I detail the flaws with the additional fit of the van, it must be borne in mind the purpose for which South Wales Police use the vans.

Traditionally SWP have had a number of "PSU" vans which are primarily used as Station vans and occasionally used as "PSU" vans when the need arises. On average, they may be used once a week for a full PSU shift, which will be at either Swansea FC or Cardiff FC during the football season. The remainder of the week they will be utilised on response or neighbourhood teams for patrol purposes and officers will have the knowledge that as they have a cage in the back they would also be used to convey, non-compliant, drunk, and mainly violent prisoners to custody suites. Hence the shout "We need a van."

However, there are a number of issues with the new cage installed in the van.

In order to demonstrate pictorially I have used two of my team colleagues. One is around 5'8" in height and medium build, the other is around 6'2" and larger build.



Dimensions

The current cage has been placed into the rear nearside corner of the van.

The main entry door is revealed when you open the rear nearside door. This noticeably has a very small aperture compared to the cages installed in the previous station van.

There is a step which you have to utilise to get into the cage and as the detainee tries to negotiate this there is an opportunity for them to “donkey” kick out at officers if they are standing too close. Kicks would be aimed at the chest area or even higher, which has been highlighted in the incident report.

There is also an opportunity for detainees to “lock out” if not handcuffed and splay their arms across the aperture to resist being placed inside. Even with handcuffs on there is an opportunity for detainees to use their shoulders against the sides of the aperture to resist access.

There is a small seat inside the cage and due to the small dimensions and the fact that detainees sit on it facing the rear cage door, it is too easy for detainees to hold onto the sides or push against the back and use leverage to kick out, whilst standing or sitting, at anyone who may be opening the rear cage door. Considerable force can be generated in this manner.



Height restriction

The cage is also restrictive for taller detainees as demonstrated by my taller colleague and the top of the inner cage door is also much lower and poses a risk of head injury to officers assisting to put detainees in or out and also a risk to the detainees.



Visibility restriction

Also of concern is the lack of visibility officers have from the outside looking in. There are still too many incidents where detainees under the influence of drugs or alcohol or suffering mental illness are injured from self-harming / suicide attempts whilst in the rear of a police van.

There is a need for greater visibility into this cage to allow officers to observe the detainees to check on their welfare and to observe their position and demeanour prior to opening the door to check if it is safe to do so.

The small dimensions also have a claustrophobic feel about it and this may also cause detainees to become more anxious than they may have done in a more spacious cage.

Entering the van from the side door the cage is on the right as you walk down the aisle. There is a second door which opens into the inside van space, however this is even narrower and even the smallest officer had to get in by shuffling to the side.

Escorting safely

Some forces have a policy that a detainee in the rear cage of a van has to be escorted by at least two officers i.e. the driver and one other. This is understandable due to the high risk of detainees self-harming/ attempting suicide as mentioned above. However, the design of the rear of this van doesn't allow for an officer to position themselves adequately to perform the monitoring role and as also mentioned previously the view afforded of the inside of the cage in my opinion is not adequate enough for safety.



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