

(PDS) in Alberta, says there are 112 dog handlers forcewide and about 112 different opinions on the use of canine vests. A 16-year veteran of the dog section, Sgt. Barber says his personal opinion (not that of the police dog section) is that he would never use one on his dog.

“I would never put one on my dog. We ask so much of our dogs. If they’re sent in to take down a drunk guy with a shotgun in his house, speed and agility is their big advantage. I feel we’d be taking away their agility and quickness. We put them in life or death situations. It wouldn’t work if we put something on them that they are not comfortable with ... that isn’t natural to them.” Cst. Mackown disagrees that the vest is interfering with *Brit’s* ability to do his job. “*Brit* is quite comfortable with the vest on. It also has a built in tracking harness which is what all handlers put on their dogs when they are tracking bad guys.”

He adds that most police dog handlers have not had the opportunity to see how the vest can work. “It takes less than 40 seconds to put on the vest — and it could save his life. The advantages are tremendous versus any disadvantages.”

RCMP S/Sgt. Tom Howarth, I/C Police Dog Coordinator for “E” Division, says that getting vests for their dogs has become a real community effort in British Columbia. S/Sgt.



Police dog wearing the vest scales 5–6 foot fence during agility testing.

Howarth says, “They aren’t suitable for everything — but offer real protection for some searches. I think they are very beneficial and hope we get them for all our dogs.”

Currently 10 of the 69 RCMP dogs in “E” Division have acquired the vests at no cost. The SPCA in Kelowna (run by a former RCMP officer) is spearheading fundraising efforts through other SPCAs and related agencies across the province. Their goal is to purchase the vests for all RCMP dogs in the province. “We lose 1-2 dogs each year out here so people hear about it. Getting the vests has become a community effort. We hope to have them for all of our dogs,” explains S/Sgt. Howarth.

Health and Safety Committee DSRR Steve Raine says his committee haven’t looked at the canine vest issue. “We have not reviewed any documentation regarding this, so I can’t speak for our committee. But, my own impressions are that it seems to have some positive traits that should be considered. I concur that the financial investment that we have in our PSDs is far greater than the cost of these vests. The vests may allow the animal to continue protecting our member instead of being out of service. It is something we should look at.”

Vest designer, Cpl. Slater, says they’re willing to help the RCMP test the vest. However, he stressed that because custom-fitting of the vest is crucial to its comfort and success (free range of movement etc.) “to evaluate the vest properly, it must be worn by the dog it was made for. You’ll get bad results if you try to switch [the vest] between dogs.” As for whether other RCMP dogs may soon be wearing their own canine carriers, it seems the jury is still out. ❖

For more information check out the K9 Storm website at www.k9storm.com or write them:

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