

slightly back. Webb says most people don't pull up right beside the car because they don't want to be caught staring.

"There's so few around that people look at them, even when they're unmarked," he said of the Beetle, "but when you put all the stuff on ..." he trailed off alluding to the fact this car is definitely different.

Even a man in a 4x4-construction truck can't help but smile as he watches the car pass him.

Maybe it's because it's a cute car, or the shock of seeing the RCMP stripes and lights — items that normally strike fear in drivers — on a vehicle that makes people laugh. The more that laugh and notice it the better, Webb says.

He turns onto the No. 2 highway and heads north. As he drives to the school where he is a guest at the grade 9 career fair, Webb stresses that it is an information — not recruiting — session.

"Essentially all I'm doing today is to attract attention," he said. "We're not out here to have them sign on the dotted line, it's simply a matter of giving them information."

He sees the sign for Kathryn and turns onto the road leading to the school. The school has 310 students bussed in from a 25-km radius and is a short distance from the town, which seems to be comprised of four houses and an elevator.

Turning into the schoolyard, kids in the playground see the car and start jumping up and down and pointing.

Not all students inside the school have seen the car's approach so the age-old questions like "Can I see your gun?" and "What's wrong? Why are you here?" surface in the crowded hallway swarming with elementary students.

Three young girls who saw the car approach Webb.

"Can you arrest us?" they ask thrusting their wrists at him. "Why?" he asks. "So we can get a ride in the car," is their answer. He's heard it all before, but is still friendly when he answers the questions.

At the school Webb meets Cpl. Clarence Bodden, his co-presenter for the fair. Bodden is the Detachment Commander in Beiseker, Alberta, and has been stationed there for 12 years. The 30-year veteran is a regular at the school and kids greet him with "Hi Mr. Bodden," at ease with a law enforcement officer they might not have spoken to in the days before the RCMP instituted community policing.

The men speak about their careers with the Force and astonish the students with tales of "the old days of the RCMP," when recruits were male and young officers had to ask permission to marry. The students ask questions, but are anxious to see the car they heard about. The talk was all through the school.

Finally, it was time to give the students the opportunity to view the cars. Words like "cool," "awesome" and "cute" were bandied around as they crowded in on the Beetle and Bodden's Crown Victoria cruiser.

Young people willingly made their way into cars they wouldn't want to see at a party on a Friday night. They tested out driver, passenger and backseats, feeling the panic of being trapped with no way out and a Plexiglas divider muting their sound in the Crown Victoria.



*Cpl. Webb and Cpl. Clarence Bodden make a presentation at the grade 9 career fair.*

*Photo by Veronica Russell, Prairie Girl Photography*