

Federal grant funds sky-high clocking of speeders

BY RALPH R. ECHTINAW
STAFF WRITER

People with radar detectors who say they'll get a speeding ticket when pigs fly meet their match.

The Michigan State Police, in cooperation with police departments in Farmington Hills, Southfield and Troy, are busy clocking speeders from the sky-high vantage point of a Cessna 172 airplane.

The program, funded by a \$30,000-per-year federal grant, has been in effect since 1988. State police 1st Lt. Don Bracke said that last year officers wrote 3,800 tickets statewide and made

46 criminal arrests as a result of airplane traffic stops.

The federal money is sufficient to lease three aircraft for the summer and spend 600 hours in the air, Bracke said. A Cessna operating out of an airport near Howell covers the Detroit area. The airplanes are leased "wet," meaning the fuel is included, for \$50 an hour.

An officer in the airplane clocks speeders as they drive between big white marks on the freeway. The data is transmitted by radio to officers on the ground who stop the speeders and write tickets.

On 1-696 one day last month state police pilot David Halliday

worked with five Farmington Hills officers on the ground to ticket 23 motorists moving at least 80 miles per hour on I-696 in less than two hours.

Halliday, who is paid \$18.06 per hour, is a full-time state trooper who used to work for the Franklin Police Department, Bracke said. The pilot used his contacts in Oakland County and his knowledge of area departments to bring the three participating cities into this program.

The key to being able to participate, Bracke said, is that a department should have "strong traffic enforcement activities going on." The departments in

Southfield, Farmington Hills and Troy all have officers assigned strictly to traffic, Bracke said, meaning they can easily muster the number of cars and officers needed.

Troy, for example, can put four to seven cars and officers on I-75 to respond to the airplane's call without getting into overtime pay for anyone, said Lt. Rick Hay. In one 3 1/2-hour period June 23, Troy officers stopped 68 motorists clocked by the airplane at least 75 miles per hour and wrote 62 tickets.

The officers assigned to the airplane duty, Hay said, all work in the traffic department and would

otherwise be patrolling the streets.

An additional Troy officer in the aircraft acting as timer would also be patrolling if he wasn't in the air, Hay said.

However, "they would be writing for fewer tickets during that period of time," Hay added that "the city of Troy does not do this for the revenue."

Cities like Troy usually write

tickets in accordance with local ordinances, meaning that ticket revenue is distributed to three different sources. Troy Sgt. Larry Knapp said most of the speeding tickets Troy officers write are for 10 miles per hour over the speed limit, which carries a fine of \$75.

The first \$20 of that goes to the state. One-third (or about \$18) of the remaining \$55 goes to Troy's general fund. The rest goes to Oakland County.

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