

Edinburgh's first 'Panda' back on the road

Edinburgh's famous Pandas Yang Guang and Tian Tian have returned home to China, but a replica of the city's original police "Panda" car will be on display at a special event commemorating 50 Years of Fettes Police HQ.

The first Panda car – so called because the original design was black and white before the familiar light blue colour was chosen – arrived in Edinburgh in 1968 and marked a change in the way the city was policed.

A new Unit Beat Policing System was introduced and while the city centre kept the old foot beat system, everywhere outwith adopted the new system, with Craigmillar, Mayfield, Drylaw, Corstorphine, Oxgangs and Portobello now policed by a combination of Panda response cars and community officers on foot.



Former Deputy Chief Constable Tom Wood with his replica Panda Car. Picture Alan Simpson

Former chief officer Tom Wood commissioned a faithful recreation of Edinburgh's very first Panda, registration GWS 462D, and the car will take centre stage at an event where serving and former officers can bid farewell to the surplus-to-requirements former police headquarters which is being disposed of by Police Scotland.

Tom said: "The first Pandas were all Morris Minors, tough and reliable little cars that even police drivers couldn't break! Always underpowered, the Morris Pandas were not designed for pursuit, in fact this was specifically forbidden and the early cars were deliberately not fitted with blue lights or sirens.





“Despite this, pursuits were common as car theft and joyriding was a problem and a particular favourite of the thieves was the early Ford Escorts. Though the Escorts had greater top speed, Morris Pandas when driven determinedly and fitted with new radial tyres, could often chase them down in the narrow winding streets of the housing estates.”

Following the 50 Years at Fettes event, (open to serving and former officers) Tom hopes to loan the Panda out for local historical displays or to be used for TV or film purposes. He added: "This is the very car that Edinburgh's most famous detective, Inspector John Rebus, would have driven in his early days, so when Ian Rankin writes the prequel about his famous sleuth I might get a call."

- The replica bodywork was completely renovated by master welder Jim Bayne (father of a serving Police Scotland Officer), the engine was rebuilt by Ewan Rutherford of Monktonhall Motors. Thanks to The Museum of Communication 131 High Street, Burntisland, for their donation of period radio equipment.

All pictures by Alan Simpson.



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