

## License Plate Reader Aids Lower Police

ERMA- Lower Township police have a new tool to aid in recovering stolen vehicles, removing unlicensed drivers from the roads and arresting drug traffickers, an Automated License Plate Reader (ALPR).

The system uses three cameras mounted on the roof of a police cruiser, one pointed straight ahead and two pointed to the left and right of the vehicle. The devices can see in the dark with infrared technology and capture hundreds of license plate images per minute.

Lower Township police received an ALPR via a Homeland Security grant from the county Prosecutor's Office.

Lower Township Police Chief William Mastriana said ALPR takes a photo of a license plate and stores it in the system. If there has been a "be on the lookout" warning on a vehicle or an advisory on a wanted or missing person, the ALPR will match that to the photo of the tag and notify the police officer with an audible alert.

The ALPR connects to the officer's onboard computer. At the beginning of a shift, the officer updates the information in the ALPR.

"The key to the whole thing is verification," said Mastriana. "We're not going to act just on the fact this reader is giving us a hit on something, we're going to verify it."

He said officers verify information through the dispatch center using the National Crime Information Center, (NCIC).

ALPR can aid in identifying those with restraining orders driving in areas they have been ordered to avoid, said Mastriana. In area with an upward trend of burglaries, an ALPR equipped police car can be helpful keeping track of vehicles entering the neighborhood, he said.

Officers who use ALPR must be approved by the chief or another supervisor and receive training on use of the device including a strict verification process on any alerts generated by the system, said Mastriana.

"There are heavy checks and balances on the way the system is used," he said.

According to Lt. Patrick Greene, the ALPR flashes a display of the tag and the vehicle it's mounted on, so the officer can quickly spot the car in heavy traffic.