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**Lee police get hot new cruiser from drug money****By MARCUS WEISGERBER****Democrat Staff Writer**[mweisgerber@fosters.com](mailto:mweisgerber@fosters.com)

LEE — David Starsky had his Ford Gran Torino Zebra 3 police car. Now Lee Chief Chet Murch has his Dodge Charger police cruiser.

The first 2006 Dodge Charger LX police car in New England will hit local streets in the next few weeks. And it did not cost taxpayers a penny.

One thing this car has in common with the tomato red sports police car from the popular 1970s TV show "Starsky and Hutch" is it will certainly turn heads.

The car, which was delivered to the Lee Police Department Wednesday, was fully funded with drug money seized by the New Hampshire Attorney General's Task Force during a bust last year, Murch said. Lee initiated the investigation, which led to the termination of a large drug ring. Because of this the town has received money for new cars the past two years.

Last year the department purchased a 2005 Dodge Ram 1500 HEMI four-door pickup, which is used for undercover work, with money allocated from the same drug bust. The Ram and the new charger are worth about \$57,000, Murch said.



**Weisgerber/Democrat photo - Sgt. Tom Dronsfield gets a feel for the Lee Police Department's new Dodge Charger.**

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**Weisgerber/Democrat  
photo**

The Charger will add muscle to Lee's fleet, which includes the Ram, three Ford Crown Victorias and a Ford Expedition.

Under the hood, the Charger packs a 5.7-liter V-8 340 horsepower HEMI that can go 0 to 60 in just 6 seconds. The cruiser sits on 18-inch steel rims. In comparison, the Crown Victorias are rated at 250 horsepower.

The new Charger operates in four-cylinder mode when less power is needed and eight-cylinder mode when more power is required. This improves fuel economy by 20 percent, according to specifications provided by Dodge's parent-company, Daimler Chrysler.

The Environmental Protection Agency rates the Charger's fuel economy at 17 miles per gallon in the city and 25 miles per gallon on the highway.

"This is a brand new designer car, but it happens to have a better setup and fuel economy than the Crown Victoria," Murch said.

One major modification between the police Charger and the civilian version is the shifter is moved from the console to the dashboard adjacent to the steering column. This allows room on the console for computer and radio equipment.

A switch on the shifter allows for manual shifting of the five-speed transmission without the use of a clutch.

The Charger becomes Dodge's third vehicle to enter the police car market since the company offered the 2002 Dodge Intrepid. The Intrepid became the first Dodge in 12 years to be offered in a police edition.

Dodge is also offering the Dodge Magnum as a police vehicle.

Lee's two supervisors, Sgt. Tom Dronsfield and Sgt. Brian Huppe, will drive the new Charger on their daily patrols.

The two sergeants were giddy with excitement when the car arrived Wednesday, giving suggestions of where lighting should be mounted and testing out some of the car's options.

Hours after delivery, the car was measured for detailing, which will be done next week. Inside, the car will be equipped with state-of-the-art computer and lighting systems by University of New Hampshire-led Project 54, which developed the popular voice-activated computer software program.

The computer system is currently installed in hundreds of police cruisers across the country. Project 54 plans to show off the Lee Charger at the International Association of Chiefs of Police convention in Boston later this year, Murch said.



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**2006 Dodge Charger Police Vehicle.**

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