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I-Team: I-55 drug busts

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NEW MADRID COUNTY, MO (KFVS) - Before marijuana, cocaine or heroin makes it to the streets of any Heartland city, drug couriers or mules drive those deliveries, often cross country.

In southeast Missouri, two dedicated troopers work to stop those deliveries in their tracks.

"737 Poplar Bluff," Corporal David Crank called into his radio just moments after searching an Ohio couple's trunk following a traffic stop back in August 2012.

"Get on the ground," he commanded the pair. "On the ground!" Then back to his radio. "I need some assistance. I've got a seizure."

On this day, it's roughly five pounds of crystal meth. In five years together, Corporal Crank and his partner, Corporal Shane Stewart, work the Interstate 55 corridor that runs from the I-57 interchange to the Arkansas state line. They seized \$2 million in drugs and a half million in cash last year alone.



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"It was three college students," Crank recalled as he looked at a picture taken from a past bust. "They were coming from Austin and they were taking 100 pounds of marijuana and a little bit of cocaine up to Ohio."

While some of the interdiction work done on I-55 is easy to see, some of it isn't. And while Corporals Crank and Stewart don't plan on revealing all of their secrets, they do say that they watch for unusual driving patterns and once they get a vehicle pulled over, hearing about trips that simply don't make sense.

Stewart recalled a driver traveling from Indiana to South Texas, claiming he needed to visit a dying relative.

"Looking at his trip, some paperwork in his car, he only spent 30 minutes in South Texas. And if the trip was that important and someone was terminally ill like that, you're going to spend more time than just 30 minutes."

"Are these drugs that are actually going to end up here, or are they simply passing through," we asked Stewart.

"Eventually, they'll end up here," he replied. "Most of the stuff we get on 55 is going up to Chicago or St. Louis or Indianapolis or a major city. But that trickles down to Sikeston, trickles down to Charleston, southern Illinois, Kentucky."

There is a third member to this drug interdiction team. Five-year-old German Shepard Edy has helped make some major busts, including 50 pounds of cocaine seized after Crank pulled over a woman traveling with a small child from Dallas to Chicago.

"And the thing about this stop, is her child was sitting on the trap where the cocaine was," Crank recalled.

While the August 2012 bust went smoothly, they don't all do. Just five months earlier, Crank called Stewart for backup after the passenger in the car he just pulled over had a look on his face the trooper won't soon forget.

"Shane got there," Crank recalled. "I informed him what I saw. We re-approached the vehicle. Shane opened the driver's door and the front seat passenger shot him."

"And I can remember it," Stewart said. "And the reason it stands out is just because it was at night. I leaned in the vehicle just a little bit. And so when I did, you could see the muzzle flash."

Both troopers say they learned from that near-fatal night, but even that risk won't keep

them from continuing the fight to clear these roads of illegal drugs before they arrive in your hometown.

"You know, some people who use drugs they get a rush from doing drugs," Stewart said. "Whenever you stop a car and you get a large load of marijuana, cocaine, heroin, whatever it is, we get a rush."

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