

## **Breeze hands-free headset by Lowe Electronics 'Keeping hands on'**

**by Matt Langridge, PCI# 869**

*Thames Valley Police (UK)*

The 'Breeze' headset is, in my view, a potential lifesaver when instant communications are needed whilst cycling in difficult situations.

### **Why?**

In May 2004, whilst setting up the small Cycle Patrol Team in High Wycombe, UK, an area with more than its fair share of uphill stretches, there were many occasions when I was either called by my Control Room (dispatcher) or needed to call them via my radio whilst hauling hard up one of the hills. I quickly learned that having one hand on the handlebars and one hand fumbling for the radio transmit button whilst climbing a 1:10 hill is a quick way to a) scare the pants off yourself and b) really annoy the motorist about to pass you.

I made contact with my Force's communications department, but there was no equipment available to remedy this issue, as we had just converted to a new radio system and the need had not been identified at that stage.

I then contacted Richard McLachlan at Lowe Electronics. I described the problem I had encountered and discussed my requirements with him. He had no 'off the shelf' product available, but, having dealt with similar issues for another customer, was able to offer a modification to an available headset which would solve the problem. He undertook to get a unit made up for me. This was at about 2:00 p.m. When I arrived at work at 10:00 a.m. the following day, the headset was waiting for me on my desk!

### **The Headset**

The headset comprises a small external earpiece which sits on the ear and a flexible 'boom mike', which comprise a small unit. This unit is mounted on a sprung metal headband, which is worn with the band passing around the back of the head, avoiding fouling any cycle helmet straps and adjusters. The flex form headset is fitted with an 'in line' press-to talk-switch (PTT). Wired into this switch is a short lead and small coaxial socket. Connected to this socket via telephone-style curly flex is a handlebar mountable PTT. This is a large red button with a Velcro strap which can be fitted anywhere on the bike. The coaxial plug link allows for a quick disconnect from the handlebar PTT in the event of a foot pursuit or, God forbid, a crash. The Breeze headset is compatible with all UK TETRA handsets.

### **The Proof of the Pudding is in the Eating**

As soon as I received the headset, I fitted it to my radio and bike and have since been using it on a daily basis in a full range of conditions, including torrential rain and snow, heavy traffic, and fairly extreme off-road routes.

It took me a few tries to locate the ideal microphone position, which is important because the microphone is of the 'background noise suppression' variety. Neither my control room operator nor colleagues whom I was contacting directly could detect traffic or wind noise. Once set up, the equipment met all of my requirements, even during incidents where maintaining mobility was important. In one instance, an offender was making off on foot from an injured colleague. I was able to follow this offender despite his best efforts to lose me along alleys and down steps, whilst transmitting a commentary to enable other units to deploy accordingly. On another occasion, I pursued and caught a small motorcycle in woodland whilst my crewmate was able to monitor my commentary and deploy to exit points from the wood. On both occasions, these commentaries were instrumental in the apprehension of the offenders.

Equally important as apprehending suspects, responding to radio calls, or conducting calls whilst on the move, no longer present a safety hazard.

I have noticed only two minor problems with the system. There has been an issue with the handlebar PTT connector plug which, on my set, deteriorated and caused an open channel. Richard at Lowe is looking into this and has identified a different connector, which he is fitting to my headset. Also, when cycling at speed, wind noise can drown out the earpiece volume. I overcome this by adjusting the volume on my radio.

Lowe Electronics can be found at [www.lowe.co.uk](http://www.lowe.co.uk). Contact Richard McLachlan at [richard@lowe.co.uk](mailto:richard@lowe.co.uk) for more information.

The headset cost £120 per unit, which includes the cost of the modification.

I would rate the headset as follows:

Performance 9/10

Value 10/10

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