

## Campus cops grab attention in beetle cruiser

BY LORI KURTZMAN | ENQUIRER STAFF WRITER

A big cop in an itty-bitty car?

How macho, how daunting. Here's University of Cincinnati Police Officer Doug Barge, all strapping 6-feet-4-inches of him, tooling down the road in a squat white Volkswagen Beetle, which is not only cute and compact but also happens to have decals of a ladybug cop - an officer with a badge and tie and a spotted red shell on his back - applied to the hood and doors.

"BUG ME FOR INFORMATION," Ladybug Cop says.

"The guys aren't 100 percent happy with the car," UC Police Capt. Karen Patterson jokes from the back seat. "You don't look very intimidating driving a Bug."

Yeah, but that's sort of the point.

If you live or work around UC, you've probably seen the car. It's striped in red and black and is known to attract honks and smiles from passersby and - sometimes - smirks from city cops. It's been a part of the UC Public Safety fleet since 2000, when Student Affairs and Services Vice President Mitchel Livingston wanted another way to make UC officers visible and accessible to students.

"Police need soft edges as well," Livingston said, "and all of us have a sense of humor."

So the Bug it was. It joined the force as a showpiece, a literal public relations machine with no intentions to intimidate. Think about it: Has anyone ever looked in a rearview mirror and felt that deep-belly dread - Uh oh, was I speeding? - at the sight of a VW Beetle (mind you, also the vehicle of choice of a computer support service called the "Geek Squad")?

The Bug's friendly. The Bug's not out to bust you for doing 40 in a 30.

"Hey, it beats walking," Barge says. "And it does get people talking."

Barge, Patterson and Livingston say the Bug works. It's a magnet, an eye-catcher. And yes, they say, it's funny.

Even Barge, a guy who often has the job of guarding UC officials and dignitaries - making him someone you do not mess with - sees the humor in the time he and the Bug assisted a squad car that had pulled someone over in a fast-food parking lot.

"You have to be kind of comfortable with yourself," Patterson says, as she and Barge head out in the Bug to deliver fliers introducing a campaign to reduce on-campus auto

break-ins.

To which Barge replies, "Yeah, I'm comfortable with myself."