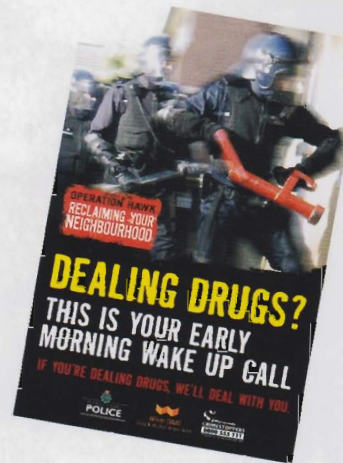




The image of the neighbourhood drug dealer as a man with a hood and dark glasses hanging outside the school gates is as outdated as that of soccer yobs with shaved heads and bover boots. Drug squad officer **Al Morgan** reveals the true picture of modern dealers and the frustrations faced by detectives hunting them down



# Waiting for the man

**S**IMON drove away from his last delivery of the day. He was glad to get out of that place – the house was a stinking mess and the dog had jumped up and got mud down his trousers. To make matters worse the people had asked for credit. This annoyed Simon. So what if they had been clients for years, if you haven't got the money then you shouldn't place an order, as simple as that. Everybody knew that the firm that Simon worked for didn't do credit. It had been a very busy day and now he was looking forward to finishing work, turning off his company phone and relaxing at home with his mum.

His boss, Gavin, had rung him earlier that day and told him he was really pleased with his work and that there might be a little bonus for him at the end of the week. Simon had been working for the firm for a year and liked Gavin, an old friend. Gavin employed seven other young lads like Simon. Despite their friendship, he didn't want to get on the wrong side of his boss. Last week one of the other lads had been caught committing the cardinal sin of stealing stock and there had been murder.

Simon liked the status his job gave him. Although he was only 19 years old, people now looked up to him and respected him – even feared him at times. His mates were jealous of his new lifestyle and Simon was eager to show off his new car, latest mobile phone and designer clothes. Most of his mates were petty criminals stealing cars and smashing up phone boxes but Simon had turned his back on all that and got a proper job working for Gavin. His phone never stopped ringing from the moment he turned it on and he sometimes wondered how he would cope with the pressure. Every day Simon was up and out of the house by 9am and sometimes never returned until the early hours next day.

Every night on the way home Simon met Gavin at the local leisure centre car park where he collected more stock and cashed up the day's money. As he turned into the car park he saw Gavin's expensive sports car ahead of him. Simon vowed that one day he would reach Gavin's level and drive a top car and wear the very best designer labels. Perhaps, because his

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thoughts were elsewhere, Simon failed to notice the two cars that had followed him into the car park or the two blokes who stood having a cigarette in a nearby doorway.

Unfortunately for Simon, complaints from local residents about drug dealing in the car park had led the police to carry out surveillance. There had been several long and boring days with little activity before the officers, concealed in vantage points around the car park, had been able to build a pattern of their activities and identify Simon and Gavin as highly active heroin and crack cocaine street dealers. The officers knew that if they didn't identify the pair tonight and stop them then they would have to abandon the operation. Next week they were going to close down a crack house causing major problems on a nearby estate, and after that officers were on leave and doing courses.

Simon pulled alongside Gavin and handed him £3,000. In return Gavin passed him a package. As Gavin drove off, Simon leant forward, pulled up the carpet in the foot well and hid the package. If Simon had been concentrating then he perhaps would have noticed the car that pulled up behind him, or that several figures were now running towards his motor. Too late Simon glanced up and realised what was occurring and tried to start his car with the intention of ramming his way out of this ambush.

As the figures got to the car Simon was almost relieved to hear loud shouts of “POLICE! OPEN THE DOOR” and saw one of the figures waving a warrant card. Well, they could have been rival dealers. He was more worried about getting shot than busted. Still Simon had no intention of waiting round or opening the door even if it was the police. He was disciplined and had been warned by Gavin to always keep the door locked, but in seconds Simon was showered in glass as the driver's window was smashed and he was restrained from kicking and fighting. A search of the vehicle revealed the truth about Simon's 'work'. Two-hundred £10 deals of heroin and one-hundred £10 deals of crack cocaine bagged up ready to supply to local addicts were recovered along with a loaded handgun hidden under the passenger seat.

**PC Al Morgan** is an officer with Merseyside Police's drug enforcement team



## DRUG SQUAD: LIFE ON THE FRONTLINE

UNFORTUNATELY this very real scenario is played out in towns and cities across the UK as impressionable youngsters are drawn into drug dealing as a viable and very lucrative career option. Enforcement resources are now largely geared towards the commercial suppliers of heroin, which goes hand in hand with the supply of crack cocaine. Simon is a perfect example of the modern day street level drug dealer known to police as a 'bread-head' – a non-user who supplies drugs not for need but for greed on a purely commercial basis.

The traditional user-dealer working from home has largely been usurped by the 'deals-on-wheels' or 'dial-a-deal' delivery service providing a virtual 24-hour a day, seven days a week facility. The only tools that are required are a mobile phone, transport and ready access to large quantities of heroin and crack cocaine. This method is utilised by middle tier dealers often purchasing multi kilogram deals of heroin and cocaine, which is then simply converted into crack to maximise profits. The drugs are then retailed on the street in street-size deals, usually £10 deals that provide maximum profit margins. It is not unusual for an average daily 'round' to generate in excess of £2,000.

The deals are distributed by teams of runners – youngsters or trusted drug users. Users are often paid in heroin and crack. These runners are a vital component of the drug supply network ensuring the 'Gavins' have little contact with either drugs or customers. Police are often frustrated in their attempts to penetrate the 'firewall' provided by these runners and lieutenants and to get to the main dealer behind the network. If a runner, such as Simon, is removed, then another willing participant is employed to conduct deliveries with barely a break in trade.

One of the major frustrations for the police is when dealers are granted bail by the courts after lengthy investigations. These frustrations are further compounded when almost inevitably information filters back that within days they are back in business. Having been given

an insight into police methods they merely evolve theirs to avoid future detection.

Local residents and communities who provide information about drug dealing are often frustrated at a perceived lack of action by the police. However the police are often busy working behind the scenes in building an evidence picture to the information they have been supplied. Although surveillance is crucial in building up a pattern of dealers' activities, it can be tedious, very uncomfortable and often proves fruitless. Operations may require several months of evidence gathering, considerable patience and a good thermos before direct action is taken against the dealer.

To be effective the police recognise efforts must focus on identifying a network and investigating it at all levels. But lack of time and resources often mean that the police are forced into arresting sections of the network which then rapidly restructures itself. In the case of Simon he pleaded guilty to being involved in the commercial supply of Class A drugs but was found not guilty of possession of the loaded gun, claiming that somebody else had concealed it in his car. He was sentenced to three years imprisonment.

Gavin was arrested but denied any involvement in supplying drugs. He was cleared during a subsequent trial but was recently shot during a feud with a rival dealer. He is currently recovering from his injuries, but still his 'dial a deal' mobile phone is the busiest in the area and business is booming. ■

