# Episode 5 - Operational Skills - v2.mp3

**Inspector John Pratt:** Hello and welcome to Tasmania Police's podcast, This is Tas police. I'm Inspector John Pratt and I'll be your host as we chat to a wide range of Tasmanian police officers about why they joined the job and why others should too. We're coming to you today from Lutruwita, Tasmania. And before we start our conversation, I'd like to respectfully acknowledge the Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the traditional owners of the land upon which we work, and pay our respects to elders, past and present. We recognise the Tasmanian Aboriginal people as the continuing custodians of the rich cultural heritage of Lutruwita, Tasmania.

**Inspector John Pratt:** On today's episode, I'm talking to trainee Constable Maddie Payne and Jack Weeding, and Joe, who's one of our operational skills instructors here at the Tasmania Police Academy. We'll be talking about mastering operational skills training, honing firearm skills and navigating urgent duty driver training. These subjects are designed to prepare our recruits for the challenges they will face on the job, and we know from experience that these are the training sessions which the recruits enjoy the most. In this episode, we'll talk about the skills that recruits learn to enable them to protect themselves and others in potentially dangerous situations. We'll also hear about the finer details of handling firearms safely and effectively in the line of duty, and how they learn to drive safely in high pressure situations. Thanks for joining me today, Joe. Maddie and Jack, let's get straight into it. Jack, can you tell me exactly what operational skills training is?

**Trainee Constable Jack Weeding:** Op skills as like, we like to call it, for me, encompasses all your self-defence, all your operational safety stuff that keeps you and your colleagues safe. You're driving, you're shooting, and then, like your self-defence and defensive tactics, which we do a lot of down here at the academy.

**Inspector John Pratt:** Do you think people considering to join Tas police need to have experience in self-defence before coming to the academy?

**Trainee Constable Jack Weeding:** Uh, no, not at all. I certainly didn't, other than a few taekwondo lessons as a six year old, I had no real background at all myself. What the program is has been amazing and showed us a lot of the necessary stuff we have to learn.

**Inspector John Pratt:** What about other members of your course? Did any of those have previous experience that helped them?

**Trainee Constable Jack Weeding:** Yeah, a couple of the guys have got some sort of judo or Brazilian jiu jitsu backgrounds, and they've actually been really helpful. Just being able to teach a few of us outside of class some of the finer points, but certainly not necessary.

**Inspector John Pratt:** Maddie, how often do you have operational skills lessons, and what does a typical ops skills class look like?

**Trainee Constable Maddie Payne:** We have about two a week on a Monday and a Friday, and then you can go through weeks at a time of training or firearms or driving. So typically it may be a bit of theory. So you go in there and learn all the theory behind the accoutrements you might use or particular defensive tactics, how to read a person, body language, all the skills you might need to effectively arrest the person.

**Inspector John Pratt:** And have you found the training so far? Are there components of it that you've struggled with or found more difficult than others?

**Trainee Constable Maddie Payne:** I've really enjoyed it. I'm not so much a physical person, but I've definitely learned tactics such as body language, how to read a person, what it takes to deal with people you wouldn't normally deal with. You don't have to be big and strong or learn how to fight. It's literally learning different techniques, you know, to deal with people. I think the driving, I get car sick, so that was probably the worst for me because it is a lot of hours and learning windy roads and whatnot. So probably, yeah, the car sick, but the firearms I really enjoyed, which was a surprise because I've never dealt with firearms before. And it was. Yeah, it was interesting.

**Inspector John Pratt:** So you talk about some of the accoutrements, as you called them, handcuffs, firearms, batons and all that sort of thing. Although you learn to use those effectively and safely, would it still be fair to say that communication is a big part of operational skills training?

**Trainee Constable Maddie Payne:** Yeah, definitely. And that's either using your words or just even communicating with body language. You start to see that the way someone's positioning themselves, the way someone's talking to you, might be a telltale sign of how a situation might be heading, whether that be good or bad. And you just learn how to read people and communicate with them before any other defensive tactics are needed.

**Inspector John Pratt:** How about yourself, Jack? Any particular areas that you struggled with in the operational skills training?

**Trainee Constable Jack Weeding:** Yeah, I think so. I found the more physical sort of self-defense stuff, more of a learning curve for me, something I had no experience really in. But they break it down, they step it out and you go through it pretty well over a number of weeks. So that was a steep learning curve, but definitely an achievable one. I'm certainly not an expert as it currently stands, but a lot better place than I was.

**Inspector John Pratt:** So Joe, you've been teaching operational skills for some time now. Can you tell us about what you expect of recruits and some of the problems or challenges that they have as part of the training? Yeah.

**Constable Joe Mizzi:** No worries. I guess some of the common things that we like to see from the recruits are just that their participation is there from the word go. With our ops skills training, we teach from a foundation level. So we like to start at a real basic information theory based level to start. And then from there we'll build up to some more advanced techniques as we go along. I guess some of the more challenging things for the recruits coming in is a lot of them haven't encountered somebody who's angry or wanting to potentially hurt them before. So for them to to encounter that for the first time and then learn some skills to overcome the fear and then to effectively control that person, it's a big step for them to overcome in the first place.

**Inspector John Pratt:** Can you talk us through a couple of the steps that you employ and techniques that you use to help people overcome that fear?

**Constable Joe Mizzi:** Absolutely. I guess, like Maddie said, we're giving people knowledge of things that they might not necessarily know in the first place. So reading somebody's body language is a big step in terms of how that person might act in the situation that we're dealing with them in. So from from those basics of body language, we then we teach them how to approach people, be it in an arrest sort of situation or be it in just an everyday approaching people as a police officer, sort of. And from there we teach how to take effective control that might be placing on handcuffs. It might be using some of our accoutrements that we spoke about, like the spray or batons or things like that.

**Inspector John Pratt:** And can you tell us how do you help recruits build their physical strength and endurance through the training process?

**Constable Joe Mizzi:** So the guys participate in PT every morning that they're at the academy with a qualified personal trainer. They'll go through group training sessions. A lot of the guys then on top of that partake in their own fitness programs. So I think Maddie attends a gym outside of what she does at PT. And then on top of that, again, there's the physical aspect of the OPP skills training. So firearms training, defensive tactics, which involves all of that self defense stuff, it's very physically demanding on top of those other things that they do. So just naturally builds their strength and endurance as we go on.

**Inspector John Pratt:** So being able to protect ourselves and other members of the public in dangerous situations is a big part of being a police officer. We often find ourselves having to safely de-escalate heightened situations. As Maddie and Jack have just explained, the operational skills training undertaken by our recruits is comprehensive and provides our recruits with the necessary skills to operate safely in what can be dangerous situations as they prepare for their first shifts on the road. If we just switch our focus now and talk a little bit more about firearms training.

**Instructor:** High port. Target to the front, up. Back to the holster. Urgent threat two shots up. Make sure you cover off after your two shots this time. Police verbal challenge.

**Trainee Constable Maddie Payne:** Yeah, I've found it really good. There's a great level of respect surrounding it, so you don't just treat it as another recruitment. There is a lot more to it than just having a gun on your hip type thing. And like Joe said, the way you point it, the way you hold it, everything is very thoughtful around it. It does have a sense of fear when you first start, obviously it is a weapon in your hand. But you kind of become desensitised to that once you see that you're in control and there's a lot of things implemented to keep that control.

**Inspector John Pratt:** Jack how about yourself, had you had any previous experience with firearms?

**Trainee Constable Jack Weeding:** I'd had very little. I did a little bit of clay target shooting at the gun range, but certainly not extensive experience.

**Inspector John Pratt:** And how have you found it, the actual training so far?

**Trainee Constable Jack Weeding:** Yeah, the training's been amazing. I've had no handgun or pistol experience at all, and I found coming in from a really foundational level. Like we said before with the theory, learning how to strip the weapon, put it back together, learn how all the parts work, then getting out onto the range and just starting from really foundational basics of safe shooting and slowly progressing through to more advanced techniques has been really good.

**Inspector John Pratt:** Yeah, Maddy mentioned that she hadn't had any previous firearms experience before. I take it that would be the case for quite a few of the recruits that come through here.

**Constable Joe Mizzi:** Yeah, for the most part, probably 95% have not handled firearms before. And usually the ones that have have been, you know, 22 rifles or something on dad or granddad's farm back in the day. So in terms of experience with a handgun, it's usually very limited.

**Inspector John Pratt:** And the training sort of overcomes any fears that people may have and builds their confidence in respect to firearm safety and handling.

**Constable Joe Mizzi:** Yeah, absolutely. Again, we start at a real basic level, especially with firearms, because it can be such a fear inducing thing for a lot of people. So we really start with theory lessons and knowledge of how the firearm works and really hone in on basic weapons handling safety. So we don't put our finger anywhere near the trigger, and we don't point it anywhere where we might not want a bullet to go should that trigger be pressed.

**Inspector John Pratt:** I think one of the good things about people not having any previous experience, or certainly some of them not having previous experience, at least they can be taught correctly from the start and develop good habits through the training rather than come in with bad habits. Would that be right?

**Constable Joe Mizzi:** Yeah, absolutely. We do often find for some of the old dogs that need to learn new tricks, there is a series of unlearning that needs to go on sometimes. Some of the fresh faces definitely are able to just hone their foundations to start with, without having to go through the unlearning, I guess.

**Inspector John Pratt:** So understandably, safety is a huge consideration during the more practical components of the course. Joe, how long do recruits spend learning to actually handle firearms?

**Constable Joe Mizzi:** Yeah. Good question. So they spent basically an entire day learning the theories behind our firearm that we use, which is encompassed by the policy and procedures as to why we're allowed to carry a firearm and then leads into how that firearm actually works. So everything that happens within that firearm, when you pull the trigger. From that moment, they then go into a lot of what we call dry practice, so the firearms are completely clear. There's no projectiles or ammunition in them at all. And we basically teach them how to hold it, how to stand with it, how to draw it from a holster and everything up to how to pull the trigger without any ammunition in it.

**Inspector John Pratt:** If a recruit was struggling with their skills in respect to firearm training, are there any opportunities for them to further their practice or get assistance with it?

**Constable Joe Mizzi:** Yeah, absolutely. So we try to work on a ratio that gives us enough opportunity to spend some one on one time with recruits. It's just one of those natural things where some recruits pick up this skill quicker than others. So we do try and provide that one on one feedback, whether it might be adjusting grips or stances. The actual bang of the firearm, when when they finally get the ammunition coming out of it can be daunting for some. So sometimes it's trying to desensitize that fear i guess when the live firing does start.

**Inspector John Pratt:** And there's also different levels, like light levels that have to be taken into consideration when training for firearm use.

**Constable Joe Mizzi:** Yeah, we do, as Jack said, we start foundation and we move to more advanced things. Some of those advanced things are low light shooting, sometimes no light shooting where the recruits illuminate with their torches and shoot from there. Some of those other things would be moving, seeking cover and how to negotiate natural obstacles like that.

**Inspector John Pratt:** So we've heard about operational skills training this afternoon and firearms training, but the practical training doesn't stop there. Our recruits participate in comprehensive driver training, which includes manoeuvring, driving in adverse conditions and urgent duty driving. This ensures that the recruits are comfortable and competent behind the wheel, especially under emergency driving situations and stressful conditions. Let's go on a short ride along with Trainee Constable Lawrence to hear what a driver training session sounds like.

**Trainee:** Coming up to the stale green lights. Um, we do have an intersection, so I'm just going to come through the right hand side check mirrors as I put pressure on the brakes as we come to a red light. Um, searching out, we have bikes who look like they're going to be a little bit through the intersection. They're doing the right thing, scanning left and right. Traffic's moving fine. Doesn't look like anybody's going to be running a red light behind me as well. Checking mirrors, cars coming up behind me, leaving a nice gap. gone green going to clear the intersection. Left and right. Have a rest okay, cool. That was good. It was really good. A couple of things. So when you're approaching a red light, go through your braking script. So talk to me about your braking script.

**Inspector John Pratt:** Residents in the Rokeby, Clarendon, Vale and Howrah communities would be pretty familiar with the Friday morning sirens as our recruits frequently take to the local stringent duty driver training. Jack, we just heard Cormac talking us through a driver training scenario. Is that typical of what a driver training session is like?

**Trainee Constable Jack Weeding:** Yeah, it is. Just recently, even a couple of weeks ago, we were working on our urgent duty drives through the area. You're learning how to do it safely, but while still carrying speed and getting to the job. And I guess safety is what it all comes back to. But it is good fun while you're out there and you get to learn to control the cars and get there safely, which is awesome.

**Inspector John Pratt:** And Maddy how about you? How much time have you actually spent behind the wheel so far?

**Trainee Constable Maddie Payne:** There's been a lot of time behind the wheel, particularly when you're. We do some night drives and you have either a week on firearms or a week on driving. You go all the way down to Port Arthur and back, or you drive down to Bicheno and back. And so, yeah, you're clocking up a lot of hours, but you're also looking at a different way to drive when it's in the police car as such. So you're looking at all the risks, all the different factors, something you might not have ever thought of until you had an instructor next to you telling you what you're looking for or what you're doing. But yeah, it's been an eye opener how different the roads can be once you have another perspective of it.

**Inspector John Pratt:** So you mentioned driving potentially to Port Arthur and Bicheno. Do you also cover things like dirt roads, wet roads, rural roads and all that sort of thing on those drives?

**Trainee Constable Maddie Payne:** Yeah. So to add extra hours, you don't just take the highway down, you'll be going the back way and finding other routes to get to the destination, which includes gravel roads and all the back roads, windy roads.

**Inspector John Pratt:** And night time driving of course.

**Trainee Constable Maddie Payne:** Yep, yep. Wildlife hopping out.

**Inspector John Pratt:** And you mentioned that you have a little bit of an issue with car sickness. I hope that's not whilst you're driving as well, is it?

**Trainee Constable Maddie Payne:** Yeah. No, it's all right when you're driving, but when you're in the back seat and they're going around corners at full speed, yeah, it starts to take its toll a little bit.

**Inspector John Pratt:** And what about you, Jake? What's the most enjoyable part of driver training that you've experienced so far?

**Trainee Constable Jack Weeding:** I think for me, going out to Baskerville Raceway, we spend 2 or 3 days out there over the course of the driver training program, learning how to corner efficiently, and you even go round in reverse around the track at one point and you slowly work up and gaining speed, building your confidence on the road, driving at speed, which is it's good fun and you're learning how to take those corners and drive those safe, efficient lines.

**Inspector John Pratt:** And at the academy here, we've got a skidpan. You've made use of that?

**Trainee Constable Jack Weeding:** Yeah, Skidpan day is a really good fun day. I think I managed to knock over more cones than were standing at the end of it, but it was a good learning experience. We've got the Skidpan car down there, just how to try and regain control of the vehicle, or try not to lose it in the first place, but to regain control and get back on course. It's good fun.

**Inspector John Pratt:** And Maddy, how have you found the Skidpan?

**Trainee Constable Maddie Payne:** Yeah, yeah, I really like the skidpan. It's an eye opener because it just shows you how little control you can have in a situation when there's a bit of oil on the road. But again, yeah, first attempt was trying not to get the cones, but that wasn't happening.

**Inspector John Pratt:** So Joe, get recruits aged from 18 all the way through to 5556. So they come with various levels of driving experience. Can you talk us through how you build the confidence and skills of pretty much a novice driver in the scheme of things?

**Constable Joe Mizzi:** Yeah. Good question Inspector. So as you said, we get people who for the most part come from civilian driving sort of situations. And as we know from driving the roads every day, sometimes we get from point A to point B without even really thinking about what's happened. I guess the difference with police driving is we need to try and one observe any traffic offences that might be happening, but to forecast any potential hazards or risks that might be happening up in front of us, and especially one when those speeds start to creep up, when we have to get to some jobs more urgently. I guess the way we try and overcome that with the recruits is we again build their knowledge on what happens on the road, the capabilities of of vehicles and how in control they can be with different settings within those vehicles.

**Inspector John Pratt:** And under stressful situations, whether it's urgent duty driving, whether it's driving on unfamiliar roads, even the skid pan, how do you build into the recruits to stay calm and remain comfortable and confident when driving in those conditions?

**Constable Joe Mizzi:** We really try and conduct our training with a demonstrate, then do sort of mentality. So we'll try and demonstrate what just a low risk drive looks like for the recruits, and then we'll start to increase the speed to an urgent duty drive and show them how in control you really can be when you're forecasting those risks and hazards, and you're doing things about your driving behaviour before you get to those potential risks or hazards, and how much of a difference it can make to the outcome of the drive.

**Inspector John Pratt:** Jack, from the driver training that you've undertaken so far, what would be the biggest learning point that you've taken away from it?

**Trainee Constable Jack Weeding:** I think the biggest eye opener was you constantly have to be looking out and as we said, look for those risks and hazards. Like before doing that training, I'd drive to work and I'd just get from A to B and not really notice what was going on on the road. And now I'm constantly looking up, thinking, oh, there's something going on up ahead there. I need to adjust my position on the road, slow down, wasg a bit of speed off. Just that alertness and awareness of the things going on around you and how you can prevent an accident from happening. Even if it might not be your fault, you can still influence the outcome of that by changing your driving behavior.

**Inspector John Pratt:** How about you, Maddie? Has it changed your driving behavior in your private life?

**Trainee Constable Maddie Payne:** Yeah, I'm definitely looking at a lot more things now. And like Jack said, there's a lot more than just driving A to B. There's risks and hazards. There's looking, as far as you can see to see if there's something coming up, always looking behind you to see what's going on behind you, also. There's a lot of elements to driving then just putting your foot down and steering.

**Inspector John Pratt:** Well, it's great to hear that the operational skills training's been going well for you both. And thank you for all your work, Joe, that you put in with all of the recruits. I hope the rest of your training continues successfully and safely, and that you have a good time on out stations shortly. Thank you,

**Trainee Constable Jack Weeding:** Thank you, thank you.

**Inspector John Pratt:** That's it for this episode of This is Tas Palace. I hope you enjoyed the conversation. In our next episode, our recruits will be preparing for outstations. Six week block of On the Job Training, where they act as special constables and experience the job first hand.

**Inspector John Pratt:** Stay up to date with all our episodes by subscribing on your favourite podcast app, and you can find all our previous episodes on the Tasmania Police recruitment website: recruitment.police.tas.gov.au/podcast.