

FWC K-9 Team

scores in the field and during certification

As the truck pulled into the open field, the yellow Labrador in the vehicle kennel began panting.

"Hear how excited he's getting," asked Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) Law Enforcement Officer Leonard "Cricket" Bailey, from Taylor County. "This dog knows he's going to 'work.' He loves his job."

In the tall grass, bobwhite song serving as background music, Bailey paced out a "track" for the dog to follow with a chew toy marking the end.

He returned to the truck to release "Buddy," a 3-year-old, who has been part of the FWC's K-9 program for two years.

Buddy wiggled impatiently as Bailey fastened the dog's working harness.

"Hang on. I want to go too," Bailey said to the dog as the officer snapped the 30-foot lead to the harness.

Bailey commanded Buddy to search. The dog took off like a shot with Bailey in tow and headed directly for the chew toy. Grabbing the toy, Buddy ran back to Bailey and placed it at the officer's feet.

"Good boy... good boy," Bailey praised. "Go ahead. Have fun."

The dog took off, chew toy in mouth, running in circles around the field.

"That dog is a tracking fool," Bailey said. "He can find anything. Did you see how he alerted on the track even before I asked him to search? He's a good dog."

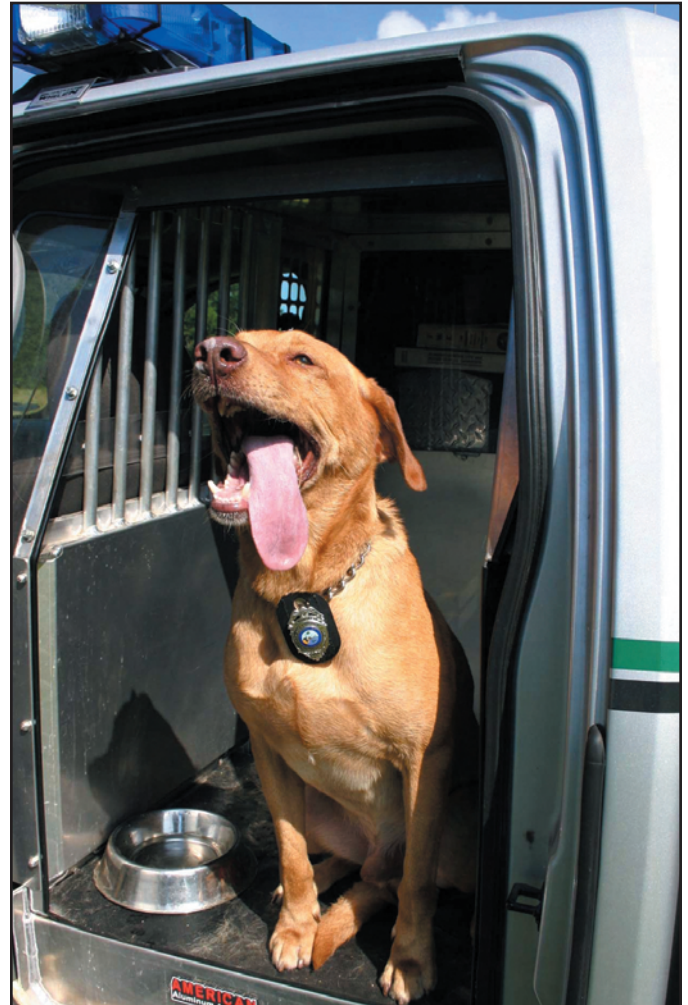
Bailey should know. Buddy is the third dog Bailey has trained and worked in the agency's K-9 program. Bailey has been a law enforcement officer with the Game and Freshwater Fish Commission and now FWC for the past 19 years. He's been a part of the K-9 program for more than 16 years and has had Buddy since the dog was six weeks old. Bailey began training the dog when Buddy was 14 months old.

"We were part of the first FWC K-9 academy two years ago. We graduated from that and have been working ever since," Bailey explained.

"My other two dogs, Wise Guy and Reba, both worked in the K-9 program about seven years each before I retired them. Both were great trackers. I've got another one with Buddy," Bailey said.

To prove that point, Buddy recently completed a five-day certification program in Punta Gorda.

"Our dogs have to be certified once a year in tracking and detection. The U.S. Police Canine Association sets course standards for police dog certification," Bailey explained.



Buddy sits in his truck kennel.

Former U.S. Secret Service trainer Raymond Rhienshart led the teams through the June 20-24 certification course in tracking and detection.

According to Bailey, the detection course consisted of five vehicles set up with two deer hides hidden in two of the vehicles and three rooms with two hides hidden in two of the rooms. The requirement was to find at least three of the four hides.

For the tracking portion of the certification, three tracks were laid out with an article hidden on each track and an article to be found by the dogs at the end of the track. The tracks are "aged" for 30 minutes before the dogs begin working.

"Buddy located all the articles on the tracking course. I think he got a perfect score," Bailey said. "This was the Police Dog 1 course and we were certified. However, since we scored at least 165 on this course, we were able to go to the next level, the Tracking Exceptional course which is set aside for