

Heightened Awareness of a Barricaded Subject

Gallatin County, Montana has a population of 90,000 and includes Montana State University and the cities of Belgrade, Bozeman, and Three Forks. Amos Ridenour, Task Force Detective for the county and Special Response Team (SRT) Leader for the joint city/county team, has been in law enforcement for 10 years and with the Gallatin County Sheriff's Office for 8 years. He has been on the SRT team for the past 5 years. The team is composed of 20 part-time operators and typically responds to calls involving barricaded subjects and confined space searches.

Detective Ridenour and Gallatin County purchased a Recon Scout XT in February of 2012. They were impressed with the XT's small size and throwability. "We were surprised that the salespeople encouraged us to throw it," said Ridenour. "It was very durable." Ridenour wanted to replace the team's bulky, treaded robot. "Our old robot was always breaking down and weighed 35-40 pounds. We were looking for something lightweight that wasn't a hassle to get out of the truck. We liked that the XT could be carried in a small pack and quickly deployed."

Ridenour and his team found it easy to operate the XT. "In addition to our regular training, we do a yearly technology update for our entire team. Each operator has six hours with the equipment. The old robot was so complicated that we just trained two operators to control it. The XT is simple enough that every single one of our operators can use it."

An Armed, Barricaded Subject

The team soon got an opportunity to use the XT. A woman called the police and said that she had gone to her estranged husband's house and he had lost control. He gave her the dog, kicked them both out of the house, and told her he was going to get a gun and end it. The two were going through a divorce, and he had made threats in the past.

"She told us that he had firearms inside, including a safe full of guns," said Ridenour. Two patrol officers were the first on the scene, followed by Ridenour and three other SRT operators. Negotiators attempted several times to reach

the subject, but were unable to get a response. When they attempted to call his phone, officers heard it ringing through the front doorway. No one knew if the subject was alive, armed, or had hostages. Ridenour thought this would be a perfect situation to use the XT.

"The neighbors reported that they may have heard a gunshot, but they weren't sure," Ridenour recalled. "We decided to use the XT to search the house for the subject and assess the situation." The front door had been left unlocked when the subject slammed it after kicking out his wife. Ridenour approached the door with a shield team, opened it, and threw the robot inside. He then controlled the robot as it transmitted video to his handheld Operator Control Unit (OCU).

"We used the robot to clear the structure one room at a time," Ridenour said. "We found the subject. He had shot himself and still had the weapon in his hand. We cleared the rest of the house for any possible hostages or victims, and then maneuvered the XT back to the subject. I handed off the OCU to another operator who used the robot to watch the subject as I led the entry team inside."

The subject had already passed away, but the XT provided information to Ridenour that enabled the team to resolve the barricaded subject situation faster than usual, saving operational costs and man-hours. It also greatly reduced the risk to Ridenour and his team. "The robot takes the pressure off of operators," he said. "It helps take the guesswork out of any operation."

Ridenour believes the quick-deploying XT has a use beyond SRT teams. "Patrol officers were the first to arrive at the scene," he said. "They could have deployed the robot even earlier and resolved the situation faster. The robot is such a valuable tool—I want to be sure that both SRT and patrol have access to it."



Summary

Agency	Gallatin County Sheriff's Office – Gallatin County, Montana
Population Served	90,000
Objective	Obtain a small, lightweight tactical robot that the Special Response Team (SRT) could use on callouts
Solution	Purchase the Recon Scout XT kit <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1.2-lb robot is extremely compact – fits in a pocket or small pack• Provides valuable situational awareness• Lowers risks to operators, and saves lives and time