

Police van keeps bashers at bay

By JOHN STAPLETON

For the last two weekends, night-time revellers on Oxford Street have been greeted by a stranger sight than usual — a large police van parked right on Taylor Square.

It is not there to keep the gay population in check, it's to keep the bashers well away.

Yesterday the Acting Police Commissioner, Mr Tony Lauer, officially opened the mobile police station.

He said the trial run was successful and the van would improve police relations with the local community, speed up police response to calls for help and reduce crime.

The van is staffed by at least four police officers and operates from 6 pm to 3 am on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights. The mobile post was set up after liaison with gay clubs and organisations.

Mr Terry Tournoff, a manager of the Oxford Hotel on Oxford Street, said there was extreme concern over bashings, and there had been talk of establishing a vigilante group.

However, he said hotel patrons were now wholeheartedly behind the mobile police station.

Two months ago, a man queueing to get into a nightclub was seriously bashed about the head by a group of eight youths.

Last week, two men were attacked on Oxford Street by two bashers at 11.30 pm. When they



Beating the bashers ... Constable Rod Matheson talks to locals at the new Oxford Street mobile police station.

Picture by MICHELE MOSSOP

halled a cab to escape, one of the attackers threw himself onto the bonnet of the car and tried to break its window.

Ms Sue Thompson, Gay and Lesbian Client Group Consultant for the police, said she had received 12 complaints of bashings in the last month. Between late September and early December, seven people have been arrested or cautioned for anti-gay attacks.

The police have conducted an eight-month campaign to encourage members of the gay community to report bashings.

"Police have identified three main groups in particular who have expressed their appreciation of this new service," Ms Thompson said.

"They are the elderly, couples dining out in local restaurants and the gay community. The station was positioned right on Taylor Square

to prevent crime, enforce the law and to instil feelings of safety and confidence throughout."

The member for Bligh, Ms Clover Moore, said the decrease in violence in Kings Cross following the increased number of police on the beat showed that community policing worked.

"I believe having a mobile station will make a tremendous difference," she said.