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THE BLUE LIGHT

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The Alabama Department of Public Safety's first Top Trooper of the Year competition has been proclaimed a success.

Competition Designed to Challenge, Motivate

It is not about finding the fastest runner, best shooter or most competent driver.

The Alabama Department of Public Safety's inaugural Top Trooper of the Year competition is a two-day program designed to recognize that one trooper in the department who possesses excellence in *all* facets of the position and the skills it requires -- including effective writing, academics, attention to detail and general knowledge of law enforcement, said Capt. Damon Summers, commander of the Alabama Criminal Justice Training Center in Selma.

The first of what organizers hope will be an annual event, Top Trooper of the Year was Dec. 12 and 13 in Selma with 15 troopers participating. Tpr. John Cleveland of Birmingham Post took top honors, followed by second-place winner Cpl. Thomas Averette of Mobile Post and third-place winner Tpr. Chuck Daniel, who is from Birmingham Post.

"Of course, shooting, physical fitness and driving were part of it, too. And we threw in some fun things purely for entertainment value for us. That made it fun for us and for the competitors," said



Top Trooper of the Year 2011 participants gathered for a group photo following the final challenge. Front row from left: Tpr. Chuck Daniel, Tpr. Chuck Ellis, Tpr. Danny Warr, Tpr. Chad Nalls, Tpr. Chase Amis, Tpr. Steven McWaters, Tpr. Will Pullins, Tpr. Chad Mink. Back row from left: Tpr. Carlos Reyes, Cpl. Thomas Averette, Tpr. Jason White, Tpr. Ed Jones, CPO Gered White, Tpr. John Cleveland and Tpr. Dewayne Battles.

Summers, adding that the competition was a blend of promotional exam and hands-on assessment. A bonus was that the event fostered camaraderie and boosted morale among the troopers. It was a way for troopers to focus on the fun and meaningful elements of the job.

As they wrapped up things that second afternoon, not one competitor had anything negative to say about this first effort. Even as they wiped sweat from their brows or swigged water and caught



REFUSE TO BE AVERAGE

their breath, most, if not all, of this year's participants vowed to be back for Round 2 next year.

Summers said all of the troopers were inspirational to watch as they worked their way through each portion of the program. Not knowing what to expect of the event, they were very reserved that first day. Within a few hours, though, they loosened up and began to interact more freely, coming together as a unit.

In fact, during a grueling "foot chase" portion, those who finished first headed

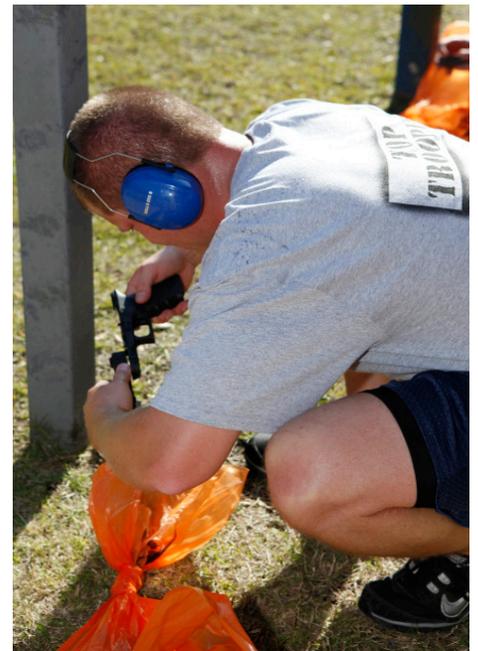
back to run that final quarter-mile with those still running. "You can't teach that kind of leadership. It comes from the heart," he said.

Summers said the idea for such a competition came to him several years ago after watching a similar program for U.S. Army Rangers at Fort Benning in Columbus, Ga. When he mentioned it during an ACJTC staff meeting in early 2010, everybody was eager to make it happen. He was extremely pleased with this first effort, due in large part to Sgt. Jeremy Lett and others at the ACJTC who

came together to design the event.

"They poured themselves into this thing, and the end result has their influence all over it," Summers said. "They were disappointed to find out that they couldn't enter the competition."

Top Trooper of the Year has a bright future. Summers said he would like to see participants from other DPS divisions sign up for the next event. He continued, "Surely there's someone willing to step up and represent his or her division – *right?*"



Major Praises Program

All 15 officers who competed in this event should be commended for demonstrating a commitment to duty, leadership, integrity, self-motivation and an *esprit de corps*.

Participants gave 100 percent effort in all areas and were challenged mentally, physically and emotionally. Their camaraderie and enthusiasm were contagious and observed in every aspect of this challenge.

This program, it is hoped, will encourage others to improve their endurance and physical ability in an effort to compete for this prestigious award, which, in turn, increases their chances of survival when faced with life-and-death challenges.



I commend Capt. Damon Summers, who tabled this idea during an ACJTC staff meeting, and the entire staff for working on this challenge for more than a year.

Sgt. Jeremy Lett should be recognized and commended for taking ownership of this assignment and putting together a course that was realistic, job-related and truly challenging. This event was no cake walk.

With support from Col. Hugh B. McCall, Lt. Col. Kevin Wright, Maj. Terry Chapman, Maj. Neil Tew and Maj. Herman Wright, the competition became a reality.

Major Marc McHenry is Chief of the Administrative Division, which includes the ACJTC.

Q&A with Top Trooper of the Year 2011

Question: OK, did you have any idea that you would win the department's inaugural competition?

Answer: Even as they were calling out names, I felt that several competitors had performed well enough to win. They were definitely a higher caliber of trooper than you normally "compete" against at in-service. The final scores show that others had done better than me in various elements of the competition. The final scores were very close, and by no means did I "walk away" with the prize.

Q: What does such an honor mean?

A: It is humbling to receive this award. This win was the result of the training that I have received and not merely my own effort. There have been so many people over the years who have passed on their knowledge, and I hope they are honored.

Q: You'll be back next year, right?

A: I'll be back, and I'll do my best. However, I would be truly disappointed if someone did not shoot better, drive faster or run harder than me next year. There are some exceptional troopers hidden among the ranks, and I'm anxious to see who will step forward.

It is important to add that the Alabama Criminal Justice Training Center staff truly deserves recognition for their work in putting this competition together.



Trooper John Cleveland of the Birmingham Post, center, was recognized Jan. 5 at DPS Headquarters. He is shown here with, from left, Maj. Terry Chapman, Lt. Col. Kevin Wright, Maj. Herman Wright, Col. Hugh B. McCall and Maj. Marc McHenry.



Left: Second-place winner Cpl. Thomas Averette of Mobile Post, center, with, from left, Maj. Wright and Capt. Thomas Ford. Above: Third-place winner Tpr. Chuck Daniel, center, with, from left, Sgt. Timothy Doyal, Maj. Wright, Capt. Reginald Fornis and Lt. Donte Vincent.

A View from the “Top”

First Place

Trooper John Cleveland, Birmingham Post
(Fourteen years with the department)

“It had some challenges – and there were a few surprises – but they encouraged us all the way. I’ll be back.”

Second Place

Cpl. Thomas Averette, Mobile Post
(Seven and a half years with department)

“I would like to see this competition become a DPS tradition.”

Third Place

Trooper Chuck Daniel, Birmingham Post
(Three years with the department)

“If I’ve got something like this to motivate me, I want to be prepared. I won’t come down here to fail.”



Participants Would Do It All Over Again

Within minutes of completing the final challenge, troopers reflected on experience.

Trooper Will Pullins, Tuscaloosa Post:

“It was as much mental as it was physical, probably more mental, but I felt ready for it.”

Trooper Chuck Ellis, Huntsville Post:

“The element of surprise had everybody in limbo. They challenged us with the unknown, and we conquered it.”

Trooper Ed Jones, Selma Post:

“I was eager to compete in this challenge. I knew the best was going to show up – and we got through every obstacle.”

Capitol Police Officer Gered White, Montgomery:

“This is something that pushed me further than I am usually pushed. It was good to see where I was and how far I have come.”

Trooper Steven McWaters, Alexander City Post:

“We are part of an elite group. We’ll be able to say we were part of the first (Top Trooper of the Year) competition.”

Trooper Chad Nalls, Montgomery Post:

“It’s a great way to have fun with fellow troopers and challenge each other mentally and physically.”

Trooper Jason White, Decatur Post:

“It’s not to see who wins actual Top Trooper award. We are 15 out of about 695 (troopers) – top 2 percent in the state – so we’re all winners.”

Trooper Chase Amis, Evergreen Post:

“It was a little bit more than I expected, but it was well planned, and I would definitely do it again.”



Trooper Chad Mink, Gadsden Post:

“I do CrossFit six times a week, and I thought I was ready, but this exceeded my expectations. I want to come back to compete next year.”

Trooper Carlos Reyes, Huntsville Post:

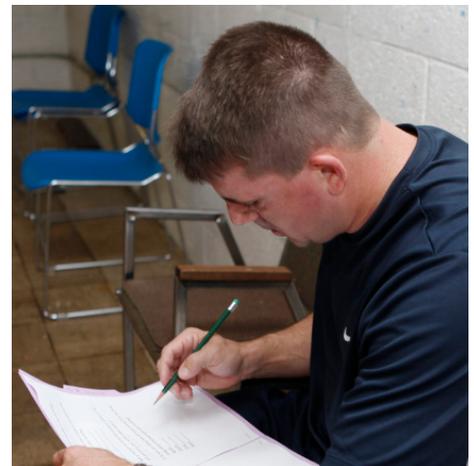
“Everybody here probably was a high school or college athlete and likes competition. I came to test myself and have fun competing.”

Trooper Danny Warr, Montgomery Post:

“I like the competition and would do it all again.”

Trooper Dewayne Battles, Birmingham Post:

“I’m ready today (to compete again). This competition really opened my eyes and revealed how important it is to continuously practice to maintain skill levels.”



Photographs by Tommy Giles and Grant Williams