There is nothing more iconic or recognizable than a patrol vehicle. The color schemes and decals differentiate vehicles from department to department. The various make and models of vehicles showcases the evolution of police vehicles. Ever since the first police vehicle in the US, a police wagon powered by electricity in Akron, Ohio in 1899, police vehicles have been ever-changing to keep up with the needs of law enforcement.

Prior to the 1970’s in Fishers, there was no official police vehicle. The marshals were required to use their own personal vehicle for patrol. Their vehicles were equipped with a CB and a police radio. The emergency lights was nothing more than a removable single bubble light that was magnetically attached to the roof. Jack Glover, a former Fishers marshal, recalled that in 1970, his vehicle was involved in an accident. After buying a new vehicle, he informed the town council that it would not be used as a patrol vehicle. The time had finally come to purchase an official patrol vehicle. Bids were taken from Don Hinds Ford, Paul Goeke Dodge/Plymouth, and Burt Pontiac Buick.

Most of the automakers were making major changes to their vehicles in 1971. The Clean Air Act of 1970 was meant to reduce air pollution nationwide. Due to health concerns, the EPA began to limit lead in gasoline. Stricter emission requirements required automakers to use catalytic converters on their vehicles. It was discovered that leaded gasoline was damaging the converters and by 1975, unleaded gasoline had become the norm. By 1996, leaded gasoline was outlawed in vehicles. Also, 1971 marked the end of high compression engines in order to meet the requirements of the lower emission standards.

The issue for Fishers was what model to choose from. Ever since Ford built the first police car, a 1938 Model 18, they had become a favorite among police departments. The Galaxie model had become iconic ever since *The Andy Griffith Show*. In 1971, Ford completely redesigned the Galaxie and equipped it with a 7.0 liter, V8 engine. The police interceptor version had 370 horsepower, which became a favorite vehicle for the California Highway Patrol and NYPD.

Dodge offered the police two different models, the midsize Coronet and the full-size Polara. The Polara had the larger engine, a 440, that came with 375 horsepower and a top speed of 141 mph. The more economical Coronet still had a two barrel 318 V8 engine. Both models bragged that no car could outrun a Dodge.

Plymouth also offered two models, the full-size Fury and the midsize Satellite. By 1968, Plymouth had become the most sold police vehicle in the US and Canada. In 1971, Chrysler had made their cars wider and larger and the wheelbase was one inch longer. The Belvedere, which went into production in 1954 was replaced in 1971 with the Satellite. The Fury used a new engine, a 360 small block with a 2 barrel carb and a single exhaust. This engine had a lower compression ratio and it was the beginning of one of the most successful police engines in history. .

With all the models available, Fishers decided to go in a different direction, Pontiac. Although Pontiac was a well established car brand, it was still lagging behind the other manufacturers. Pontiac had some success with the Catalina Police Enforcer but perhaps its biggest success was the 1977 LeMans. Many would remember this vehicle driven by Sheriff Buford T. Justice during his “high speed pursuit” in *Smokey and the Bandit*.

Fisher's first patrol vehicle, a 1971 Pontiac Bonneville, was purchased for $3000. The 4-door sedan came equipped with a 455 cubic V8 engine with 185 horsepower. It was outfitted with a light bar, emblems, scanner, first aid kit, fire extinguisher, and a siren/PA system. Later, the car would be equipped with rain gutters and an electronic trunk release. With the addition of the new patrol vehicle, Glover’s salary was amended to include $15 to cover the expense of housing and maintaining the vehicle as the city lacked the resources.

The town eventually bought a used 1976 Dodge Monaco from the Indiana State Police to complement the Pontiac. A popular model for police departments, it was immortalized in *The Blue Brothers*. Elwood Blues described it best, “It’s got a cop motor, a four hundred and forty cubic-inch plant. It’s got cop tires, cop suspensions, cop shocks. It’s a model made before catalytic converters, so it’ll run good on regular gas.”

As Fishers rolled Into the 80’s, JIm Suiter, longtime deputy chief, recalled that Oldsmobile had become the new patrol vehicle. Suiter drove an unmarked white 1980 Oldsmobile Delta 88. This vehicle was equipped with a 5.0 L Rocket V8 engine with a four barrel carburetor putting out 150 horsepower. The more powerful engine, 403 V8, was discontinued to meet the new federal fuel economy mandates. The Delta 88 was even redesigned to be more aerodynamic to improve fuel economy.

As the police department grew, so did the number of vehicles. The year 1985 was the first year for a standardized fleet for the Fishers police department and the choice was Ford. The end of the 1970’s saw the end of big gas guzzling engines in order to meet the federal fuel economy requirements. The number of police packages offered on vehicles had shrunk to just four; Ford LTD Crown Victoria (not to be confused with the later Crown Victoria Interceptor), Dodge Diplomat, Plymouth Grand Fury, and Chevrolet Caprice.

The Ford LTD Crown Victoria was introduced in 1980 and although it became a popular police vehicle, it still lacked the power that law enforcement was used to prior to the 80’s. It was used in many movies such as *Die Hard* and *Lethal Weapon.* The police package upgraded the steel frame for heavy duty use, upgraded the suspension and brakes, had larger wheels and tires, and improved engine cooling. The standard engine was a 5.0L V8. There was an optional 5.8L V8 engine with 180 horsepower but it was strictly for law enforcement use only. In 1985, the eight track cassette and CB radio options were retired and a center brake light had been added.

By 1990, there were only two options for police vehicles, Ford and Chevrolet. The Dodge Diplomat and the Plymouth Grand Fury were retired in 1989. Based on tests by the Michigan State Police, the Caprice beat out the Ford LTD on quickest 0-100mph times, fastest road course times, best brakes, highest top speed, best fuel economy, and best interior ergonomics. It was the only time that a vehicle won in all categories. Chevrolet redesigned the Caprice in 1991 and it was met with criticism. The vehicle was described as a “beached whale” and “upside down bathtub.” Due to reduced sales, increased demand for the midsize Lumina, financial troubles at GM, and consumer demand for SUV’s, Chevrolet ceased production on the Caprice in 1996. That left Ford as the de facto police car.

To compete with the Chevrolet Caprice, Ford had retired the LTD label and the Crown Victoria became its own model beginning in 1992. It also underwent a major redesign. While still using the same chassis as the Ford LTD, Ford reduced the drag to make the vehicle more aerodynamic and maximize fuel efficiency. The result was a sleek “aero” design. In 1998, the “areo” look was replaced with a more conservative design similar to the Mercury Grand Marquis. The Crown Victoria would keep this design until its final production run.

In 1999, the Fishers police department purchased a Chevrolet Tahoe for the K-9 unit. Ronnie, a Belgian Malamute, had a portable kennel that fit in the back of the Crown Vic. The Tahoe would give the K-9 more room and it was the only sport utility vehicle certified for law enforcement use at the time. Although the vehicle could be purchased as a 4WD, only the 2WD option was pursuit rated due to the center of gravity being lower than the 4WD and less prone to rollovers in high speed pursuits.

The Ford Crown Vic became the gold standard among police vehicles. It was the most widely used police vehicle in the US, Canada, and even Saudi Arabia. Since it debuted in 1992, the Crown Vic was powered by a 4.6L V8 engine that could reach up to 150mph. Other than the 1998 redesign, the vehicle remained mostly unchanged. As popular as the vehicle had been for law enforcement, Ford announced in 2010 that it would stop making the Crown Vic with 2011 as the final model year. Ford’s domination of the police vehicle market had come to an end.

As successful as the Crown Vic was during its 20 year run, there were many reasons why Ford stopped making it. One of the main reasons was that times were changing. Ford wanted to appeal to younger buyers who didn’t want to buy their grandmother’s Crown Victoria. The 2008 recession plunged many businesses into bankruptcy and Ford needed to do things differently to stay viable such as getting rid of older outdated designs. While the Crown Victoria may have come to an end, Ford continued their police presence with the Ford Taurus Police Interceptor.

But after nearly 25 years of using Ford vehicles, Fishers opted to switch their fleet to Dodge. The Dodge Charger, which was first introduced in 2006, saw Dodge reenter the police market after the elimination of the Dodge Diplomat in 1989. The Charger became an instant favorite of police officers for its tough look which was reminiscent of its muscle car days. The vehicle was equipped with either a V8 HEMI putting out 340 HP or a 250 HP V6 version. Most departments opted for the V6, as it was cheaper and just as powerful as the Crown Vic’s V8. The Charger had better braking, better ergonomic rating and fuel efficiency than the Crown Vic. The only advantage for the Crown Vic was that it was cheaper.

When Fishers began the switchover to Chargers, it was also the perfect time to switch the colors and decals. Black had replaced the blue paint scheme that had been used for decades. Fishers police vehicles always had a replica of the police patch on both the driver and passenger doors with a light blue stripe down the side. With the new Chargers, the patch was moved towards the left and the words “POLICE” were written across the side of the car in block letters.

While many officers loved the Dodge Chargers, they were plagued with a number of recalls and many police departments complained about the rising cost of maintenance. At the same time, demand for sport utility vehicles was increasing and they were no longer just for K-9 use. So in 2012, Ford introduced the Police Interceptor Utility vehicle, giving the auto manufacturer two models to choose from. Ford first introduced the Explorer as a police vehicle in 1993. Although the Police Interceptor Utility Vehicle resembles the Explorer, it is a separate model line to separate it from it’s civilian counterpart. The first year on the market, the Police Interceptor Utility became the fastest selling police vehicle in the US, surpassing the Dodge Charger. So when the opportunity arose, Fishers decided to switch the fleet from sedans to SUV’s.

Fishers kept the same color and decal scheme for the Explorers. The Ford utility vehicle came equipped with a 305 HP, 3.7 liter V6 engine which was upgraded in 2014 to 365 HP. In 2020, it came equipped with a hybrid engine, 3.0 liter EcoBoost V6, making it the first pursuit rated hybrid SUV. It could reach 0-60mph in 5.8 seconds making it the fastest police vehicle ever tested at the Michigan State Police Vehicle Testing Center. Compared to the civilian model, the police package included a more advanced ABS system, larger brake rotors, and a more efficient cooling system. The Ford Police Interceptor Utility is the most current model being used by the Fishers Police Department today.

Over the years, the department has used other vehicle models for supervisors or speciality units. The 2008 Dodge Magnum was a Charger based station-wagon that was first introduced in 2004. It was discontinued in 2008 along with the PT Cruiser convertible, Crossover, and the Pacifica. The department bought two Ford Taurus Police Interceptors, one for marked patrol and the other as an unmarked vehicle for the traffic enforcement unit. The department used a 1993 Ford Bronco, which has since become infamous as the getaway vehicle for OJ Simpson. A 2000 Chevrolet Camaro was used as an unmarked vehicle for traffic enforcement. In 2008, the Fishers Police instituted a motorcycle unit that consisted of two 2008 Harley Davidson FLHP Road Kings.

In May of 2012, Fishers Police Department went from the road to the water. Geist Reservoir, which spans 1900 acres and two counties, required a police presence. Fall Creek Township purchased a 27 foot Boston Whaler for $185,000 that came equipped with everything that the Fishers Police Department would need. The boat is equipped with sonar and infrared scanners to locate people and objects in the water. It has a GPS system and a diving platform for rescue operations. It also has a fire pump that can shoot water 150-200 feet. The boat’s official name is the “Geist Guardian” but most people refer to it by its unofficial nickname, the “USS Buzzkill.”

During the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the military produced a new type of vehicle to be used on the battlefield. The MRAP (Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected) was a tactical vehicle designed to withstand explosive devices and ambushes. Production ended in 2012 as the military transitioned to a different style vehicle. The military was left with about 13,000 MRAPS. A surplus program was established to provide these vehicles to law enforcement agencies for tactical purposes. Fishers was one of those agencies and they acquired an MRAP that is mostly used by the Emergency Response Team. In recent years, the MRAP has come under heavy criticism that law enforcement is becoming too militarized.

Police vehicles have come a long way since 1899 and they are still evolving. The days of battery operated wagons gave way to Model T’s and gas guzzling muscle cars were replaced with more fuel efficient ones. As we go deeper into the 21st century, police cars are trying to be more economically friendly, through the use of hybrid engines, without sacrificing the power and speed that law enforcement vehicles need. Some departments are even experimenting with fully electric vehicles. Pick-up trucks have become very popular and now Ford has a third model to choose from, the F-150 Police Responder. Police vehicles are a sign of the times and they reflect the changing attitudes within police administrations. Only time will tell what new vehicles we will see in the future.