

**Criminals covered:** Victoria and NSW police test the net gun, which shoots an untearable Kevlar net to disable armed or violent offenders.

# Police want hi-tech guns to fight crime

By KAMAHL COGDON

VICTORIA Police may be armed with stun guns and hi-tech net guns in an attempt to fight crime without bloodshed.

Almost 5000 officers have been injured in violent clashes in the past four years.

Police training chief, Assistant Commissioner Noel Ashby, yesterday confirmed Victoria Police was looking at arming officers with the hi-tech weapons. He said the force hoped to test stun and net guns.

He said stun guns, which temporarily disabled people by firing low-voltage electrical charges, would be used as a last resort by crack police units against the most violent offenders.

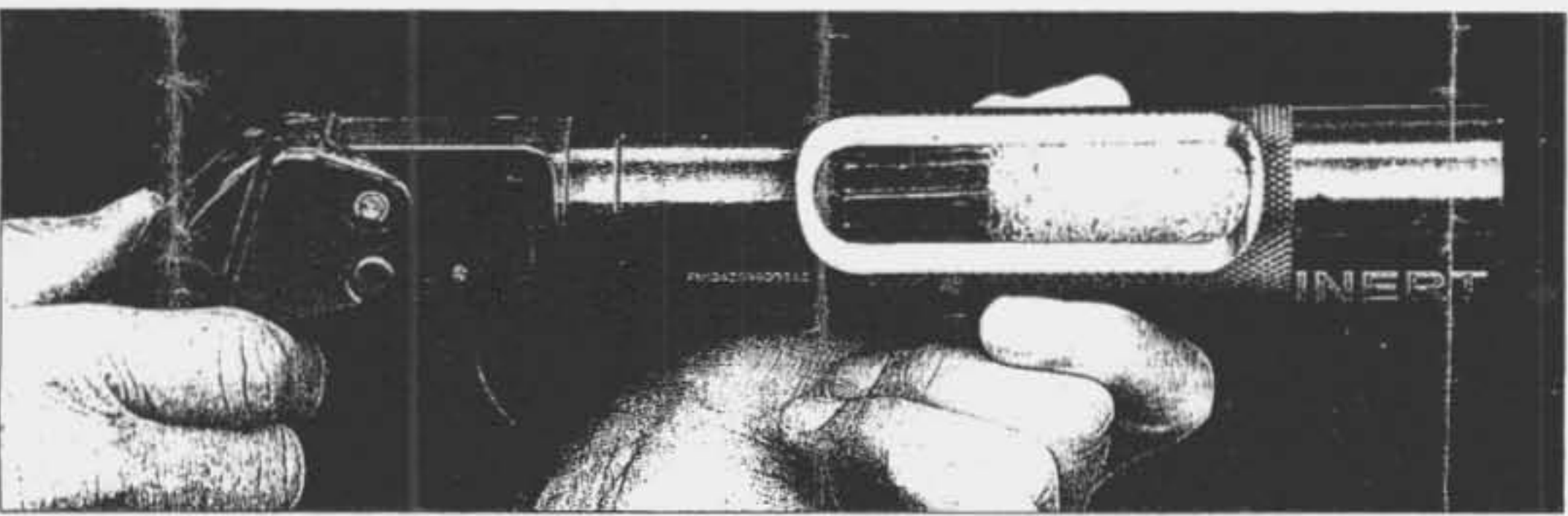
Wide-barrelled guns that fire nets also could be used to subdue armed offenders.

Stun and net guns are used widely in the US and Europe.

Mr Ashby said a major shift in training in 1997 had better equipped police to deal with volatile situations without force.

All operational officers must now attend four days of safety training a year, including capsaicin spray and firearm use.

Latest police "use of force" figures show officers have suffered 4992 injuries since 1997, with forceful arrests, brawls, domestic disturbances and sieges proving the most dangerous duties.



**A net gain:** the net gun is in use overseas and being considered by Victoria Police.

One in four forceful arrests has caused injuries to police. Despite that, policing has become safer since 1997.

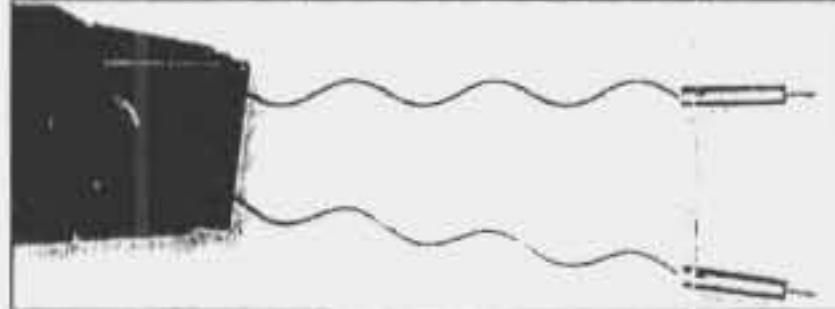
Police injuries numbered 1747 in 1997. But fell 53.8 per cent to 806 last year, while injuries to offenders dropped 37.6 per cent from 1723 to 1075.

And 45.6 per cent fewer police were wounded in the line of duty last year than in 1997.

"Previously, I think we were reactionary to circumstances around us and that led to sudden escalation of incidents and probably more violence," he said.

"Now we are constantly planning our responses to incidents and have a reasoned, minimalist approach which is necessarily firm when that is the absolute last resort."

The use-of-force regis-



**Wired:** the probes that carry the Taser's current.

ter, which records police actions ranging from handcuffing and drawing a gun to using the weapon and vigorous restraint of offenders, also reveals that since January 1, 1997: 2002 forceful arrests have led to injuries to officers and two deaths.

**POLICE** are hurt in almost 30 per cent of brawls.

**POLICE** have been hurt in 20 per cent of domestic violence cases and sieges — seven so bad they needed hospital treatment.

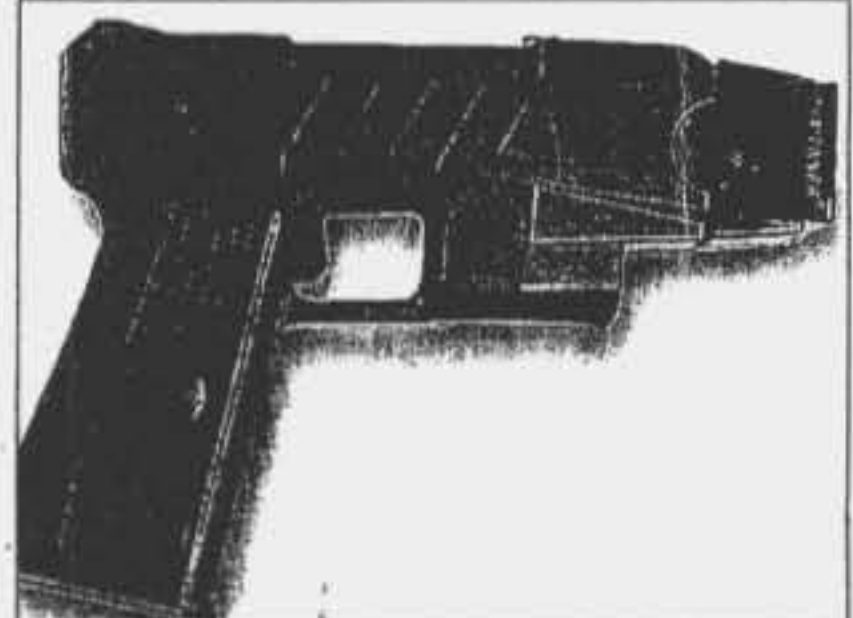
A further 11 police have been admitted to hospital.

505 officers have been treated but 3309 police have not needed attention to their injuries.

**EMOTIONAL** trauma has fallen 91.6 per cent and physical injuries have fallen 48.2 per cent.

Mr Ashby said Victoria Police aimed for a zero injury toll, but accepted it was effectively impossible because of the inherent dangers of policing.

State Coroner Graeme



**Stun gun:** the Taser M26 fires an electric charge.

Johnstone last year urged police to consider using stun guns when he cleared police of blame for a Good Friday shooting.

John Stuart McConnell was shot dead by police in Centre Rd, Bentleigh, in 1998. He had advanced

towards two officers carrying a hammer.

Mr Johnstone said it highlighted the need to find other methods for dealing with potentially violent offenders.

**HAVE your say:** **Voteline, Page 19**