

A Day in the Life

Elaine McMiken Dog Handler, Ports Unit

Elaine McMiken joined the Ports Unit in 1989 as a Security Officer. In 2001, she became the first police civilian drugs dog handler when she began working with Barney, her English Springer Spaniel.



What attracted you to becoming a police dog handler?

I have always had a great love for dogs so when the opportunity came up to apply for a dog handler position, I leapt at it.

What does your job involve?

Barney is trained to detect the presence of the scent of controlled drugs. Together we are capable of searching areas, buildings, routes and vehicles and also scanning people. We use our skills on a daily basis at the ports of Cairnryan and Stranraer and elsewhere in the force when required, with regular success.

What is the best part of your job?

There is no best part, it is all great! I started with a 12 month old dog that was just a pet and after we successfully completed an initial eight week course, I ended up with a pet that can detect drugs. That was only the start though. The real joy of the job is working and training one to one with Barney and watching him hone his skills and mature into a good search dog. Barney loves being at work and is at his happiest when he is searching as it is all just a big game for him.

What is the worst part of your job?

I asked Barney this question and he said the holidays and rest days are the worst bit as he wants to work every day.

Do you have any funny stories about your job?

When Barney was a puppy, he was nicked by a local drug user – thankfully, he was later returned to his original owner. The ironic thing is that he's now nicking the drug users.

Do you have any advice for budding police dog handlers?

Contrary to popular belief, being a dog handler is hard work; it is not just a job but a way of life. The dog needs to be cared for 24 hours a day, seven days a week whether it is a work day or not. There is a lot of training, both at work and at home, that needs to be done regularly, regardless of weather conditions. The only way to get a good search dog is to put in the work. There is a big difference between being a dog owner and being a dog handler but it is well worth the effort.