

GOODBYE, OLD PAINT!

Logan Set To Retire His Trusty Bronco

BY RAHN ADAMS

Cecil Logan claims he doesn't know how fast his Bronco—perhaps the most recognizable vehicle in Brunswick County—will travel. "I have no idea," the county emergency management coordinator says, then adds with a mischievous grin, "Fifty-five—that's the speed limit, isn't it?"

But anyone who has seen the beige four-wheel-drive vehicle blazing down the highway in a cloud of dust toward a distant fire or traffic accident knows that the 1985 Ford, adorned with flashing red lights and 10—count them—10 radio antennas, has enough horses under its hood to get Logan anywhere he needs to go in a hurry.

That will change, though, within the next couple of weeks when Logan puts his trusty Bronco out to pasture. He probably won't be driving any slower to emergencies, but he'll be riding a horse of a different color—a white, 1990 Ford Bronco.

"It's basically just like this one—except that it'll have auto-locking hubs," Logan said of his new vehicle. "I just hope the new one lasts half as long as this one."

If that is the case, then Logan's new "truck"—as he calls it—will last around 105,000 miles—half the distance the old Bronco has traveled since it was put into service for the emergency management office in December 1984. Surprisingly enough, the difference in cost between the two trucks is only about \$1,100; the old one's price tag was \$14,900, while the new one will come in at around \$16,000, Logan said.

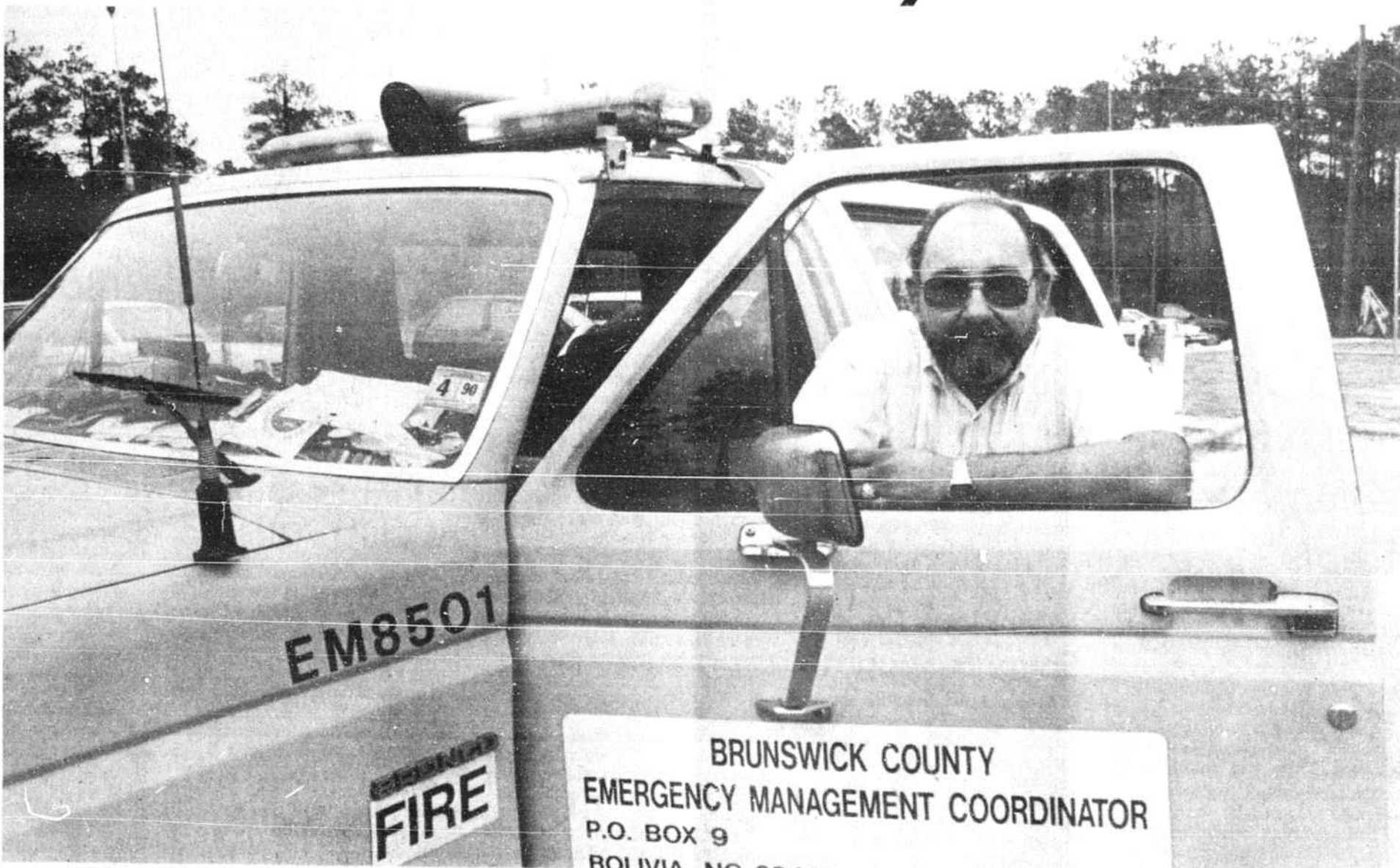
At the risk of beating a dead metaphor, the coordinator's old vehicle has been a real workhorse—not just where high mileage is concerned, but also in terms of performance and usability. While that statement isn't necessarily intended to be an endorsement for Broncos in general, it is a tribute of sorts to Logan's driving ability and his skill in jamming a literal truckload of equipment into the vehicle.

"That Bronco has seen places that most four-wheel-drives would never think about going," Logan said. He has driven the truck over the worst roads in the Green Swamp to rescue lost and injured hunters and other individuals; and it once was taken off-road to reach a remote section of the Cape Fear River near Bladen County and pick up the body of a drowning victim.

Logan also has used the truck and its winch to do everything from pull trees out of roadways to tow other emergency vehicles out of ditches. The latter part of 1989 was particularly trying for the aging Bronco, as it was called into duty during Hurricane Hugo in September and during the Christmas week-end blizzard.

The snowstorm almost was the sturdy vehicle's undoing, as its heater went on the fritz, the driver-side window fell out and the exhaust system was damaged from the truck being driven through three-foot-high snow drifts in some places. Then, shortly after the storm, the Bronco tried to bite the dust as Logan, who also is a sworn sheriff's deputy, was responding to a bank robbery call in Calabash.

Driving south from Bolivia on U.S. 17, the truck's engine began spewing smoke near The Brunswick Hospital at Supply. Logan pressed on



EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT COORDINATOR Cecil Logan will soon have a new vehicle to haul him and his plethora of communications equipment and emergency gear around Brunswick County. STAFF PHOTO BY RAHN ADAMS

until the vehicle finally gave out five miles down the road in Shallotte. "I thought that was the end of it," he said. But after whipping into a local store parking lot, Logan discovered that the Bronco had merely blown its heater hose. "I cut the bad part of the hose off, stuck it back on and kept going."

Other than minor repairs from that incident and a couple of bump-ups, the only service work the Bronco has needed over the past five years has included oil changes every 5,000 miles (translating to roughly 42 oil changes in the truck's life); installation of new tires, brakes and shock absorbers; and replacement of a transmission part.

It is small wonder that the truck has needed new shock absorbers, considering the load it has carried. When asked to list the emergency management equipment packed in the vehicle's passenger compartment, Logan needed at least 15 minutes to run down the inventory: a portable generator system with two 300-watt quartz lights, a first-aid trauma kit,

small oxygen tanks, a set of hydraulic cutters used to free trapped wreck victims, 12 hazardous materials reference manuals, the county resources book, a complete firefighting uniform, a regular jumpsuit, two blankets, assorted ropes, a large flashlight, spare flashlight batteries of all sizes, a video camera, a 35mm camera, life jackets, a tool box, axes, shovels, pry bars, an electronic Loran location finder, a police scanner, a walkie-talkie and eight mobile two-way radios.

Mounted on the front seat easily within the driver's reach, the bank of communications equipment includes an 84-channel fire/rescue radio, an 84-channel sheriff's department radio, emergency management radio, marine radio, forest service radio, amateur (ham) radio, citizen's band radio and a cellular telephone. "Plus, there's a standard AM-FM radio in there," Logan noted, adding that he only listens to it at "news time."

Why all of the communications equipment?

Because with the radios alone, Logan can reach any public safety agency in southeastern North Carolina. And on the cellular phone, the busy coordinator can be reached by news reporters and other individuals who don't have access to public safety communications. Logan said the phone came in handy during Hurricane Hugo, in particular, when he was on the road and needed to contact local evacuation shelters.

If it already appears that Logan wouldn't have enough spare room inside the vehicle to carry a bag lunch to work, then consider the fact that he also transports a 12-foot boat and 15-horsepower motor during boating season—not on a trailer behind the truck, but inside the Bronco. Of course, the boat is inflatable.

Is Logan sentimentally attached to his old Bronco? Yes, he said, but not enough to stop shipment on its replacement. He added that he hopes to keep the old vehicle as a backup unit. After all, it is a Bronco that he has never quite been able to break.

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