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Making it as a Police Officer



JUNE 2004

US \$3.00 | CANADA \$3.00





Matthew Carter listens to directions from Officer Jane Story before taking the physical abilities test Monday morning at the St. Petersburg Police Pistol Range. Carter completed the course with a time of five minutes and 13 seconds. In order to pass the course, applicants must finish with a time under seven minutes and four seconds.

# THE PEAK OF DIFFICULTY

## Making it as a Police Officer

Story by Nichol Harps | Photos by Lisa Hornstein

Matthew Carter's hands are on the steering wheel. "Maximum effort, we want the best of you," civilian training officer Jon Holtzworth urges. The clock says 0:00.

### ãOwã

Carter scurries to the trunk, removes his gun and flashlight only to find that he's left his flag belt in the squad car. On the belt, one flag represents his handcuffs, the other his club. On the streets, he could lose his life for that. Today, he loses 10 seconds.

It's Monday morning, and Carter, 24, is at the Police Pistol Range for the St. Petersburg Police Department's physical abilities test (PAT). Carter, 24, who's always wanted to be as officer for the adrenaline rush, has seven minutes and four seconds to complete the course. He's in one of the last stages required to become a police officer.

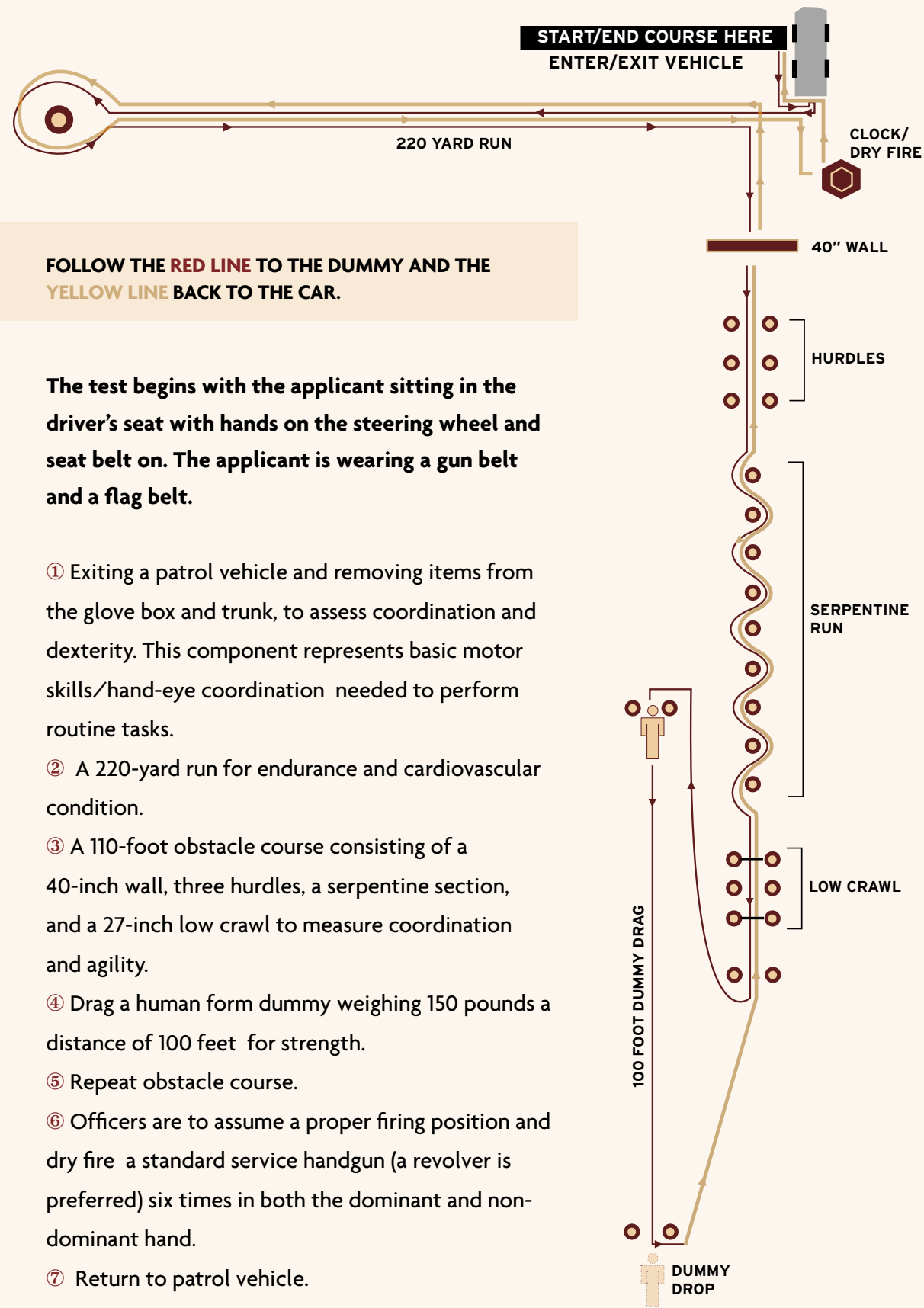
Carter's preparation for this course has been less than rigorous. "I've been doing some things to make myself better," says Carter, who's about 5'7," with a round mid-section. He says he jogged when

he could. He got his strength training from lifting boxes and furniture at his full-time sales associate job at Staples.

One minute and 23 seconds have passed. Carter picks back up his speed. He secures his gun and heads for the cones at the end of the 220-yard run. He leaps over the 40-inch wall. Carter springs over a series of three hurdles, serpentine through nine cones, and intentionally drops his flashlight at 2:08.

"Breathe out your mouth," 21-year veteran officer Jane Story reminds Carter as he lifts a 150-pound dummy and drags it 100 feet. The dummy represents a victim that Carter must pull to safety.

Although, the average officer may not have to apply these essential job duties everyday, there are times when an officer may have to run long distances, drag a heavy person, crash through a door,



The test begins with the applicant sitting in the driver's seat with hands on the steering wheel and seat belt on. The applicant is wearing a gun belt and a flag belt.

- ① Exiting a patrol vehicle and removing items from the glove box and trunk, to assess coordination and dexterity. This component represents basic motor skills/hand-eye coordination needed to perform routine tasks.
- ② A 220-yard run for endurance and cardiovascular condition.
- ③ A 110-foot obstacle course consisting of a 40-inch wall, three hurdles, a serpentine section, and a 27-inch low crawl to measure coordination and agility.
- ④ Drag a human form dummy weighing 150 pounds a distance of 100 feet for strength.
- ⑤ Repeat obstacle course.
- ⑥ Officers are to assume a proper firing position and dry fire a standard service handgun (a revolver is preferred) six times in both the dominant and non-dominant hand.
- ⑦ Return to patrol vehicle.

the St. Petersburg Police Department physical abilities test



Near the end of the course all applicants are required to dry fire a standard service handgun six times in both the dominant and non-dominant hand. The course was designed to simulate essential functions of an entry-level criminal justice officer.

### **“THIS IS NOTHING COMPARED TO POLICE ACADEMY,” SAYS STORY, WHO HAD TO RESTRAIN AN ALLIGATOR AS A REQUIREMENT FOR THIS COURSE 21 YEARS AGO.**

crawl under a tight space, or hold a suspect with one hand and handle handcuffs with the other.

Carter will have two more tries if he's unsuccessful today. His time wasn't as good for the Tampa Police Department. Five years ago, he "wasn't physically ready," and failed the Florida State Patrol test.

He runs to retrieve his flashlight, waiting for him 50 feet away, and drops to the low crawl. Carter's head is heavy, bobbing side to side, as he hears Story's voice from behind: "Keep moving you're doin' fine." He snakes back through the single row cones and leaps over the three hurdles. Three minutes and 26 seconds have passed.

This spring, Carter found what he was looking for with the St. Petersburg Police Department. The

department sponsors officers and pays for their training at the police academy, which costs \$2,300 plus books and fees. Carter felt physically ready for this Physical Abilities Test (PAT), which is conducted once a week, but he wasn't financially ready. He's been saving money to pay for the police academy.

Carter jumps back over the wall again, as his gun belt falls to the ground. Last time, he dropped his club and cuffs. This time it's his gun. Another misfortune that could cost him. The clock says 3:35.

Holtzworth looks down at the stopwatch, but doesn't call out the numbers he sees. "Looking good Matt, finish strong," Holtzworth says as Carter heads for his second 220 yard run.

He's at 4:00 when he returns and assumes



Jon Holtzworth, a civilian trainer, arranges cones for the hurdles section of the physical abilities course Monday morning. Holtzworth has been working with St. Petersburg police for 23 years and administers the course with a recruiter.

**“UNFORTUNATELY, THAT’S HOW A LOT OF PEOPLE GET OUT OF SHAPE, BECAUSE THERE’S NOTHING REQUIRING THEM TO STAY IN SHAPE,” - CYNTHIA MAZYCK.**

the firing position. He didn’t drop his gun this time. He fires six shots with his right and six with the left.

Usually, the PAT and the physical examination are the last and most physical assessments required before an applicant is accepted as a police cadet. The other assessments - polygraph examination, vocational assessment, oral and written psychological evaluation, controlled substance test and background investigation - are all required before an applicant is accepted into the 21-week police academy.

“This is nothing compared to police academy,” says Story, who had to restrain an alligator as a requirement for this course 21 years ago. Previously, officers had to learn to restrain an officer before the Fish and Game Commission arrived. The academy, which is conducted by the criminal justice department at St. Petersburg College, is 760 hours, from 7:45 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. weekdays. The academy has a similar course that is completed daily. In addition, pushups and sit-ups are added to the daily routine.

“I’ve seen a lot of applicants drop out during the police academy,” Story says.

Carter returns to the squad car at 5:03, replaces the flashlight and handgun and locks the trunk. He gets into the car, places the key in the glove

compartment, and fastens his seat belt.

Carter will have to push himself, to keep up with his fellow recruits. The average time for a man at the St. Petersburg Police Department is 4:30, for women it’s 5:30.

On this day, Carter’s co-applicant, Chris Hummel, completes the course in 4:34. At 1:00, Hummel had completed his 220-yard run and was on his way through the cones. At the time, Carter was on his way to the 220-yard run.

Every four years officers go through courses on diversity and racial profiling, domestic violence and Mobile Field Force Training. There are no mandatory physical assessments after police academy.

“Unfortunately, that’s how a lot of people get out of shape, because there’s nothing requiring them to stay in shape,” said sergeant Cynthia Mazyck, the recruiter for the St. Petersburg police department.

There are opportunities for officers to take personal interest in their physical fitness, including a free 24-hour gym and defensive tactic courses.

Back in the car, Carter returns his hands to the steering wheel. Holtzworth calls out the time.

“I did better than last time,” Carter sighs with relief.

The clock says 5:13.

Carter passes. ■



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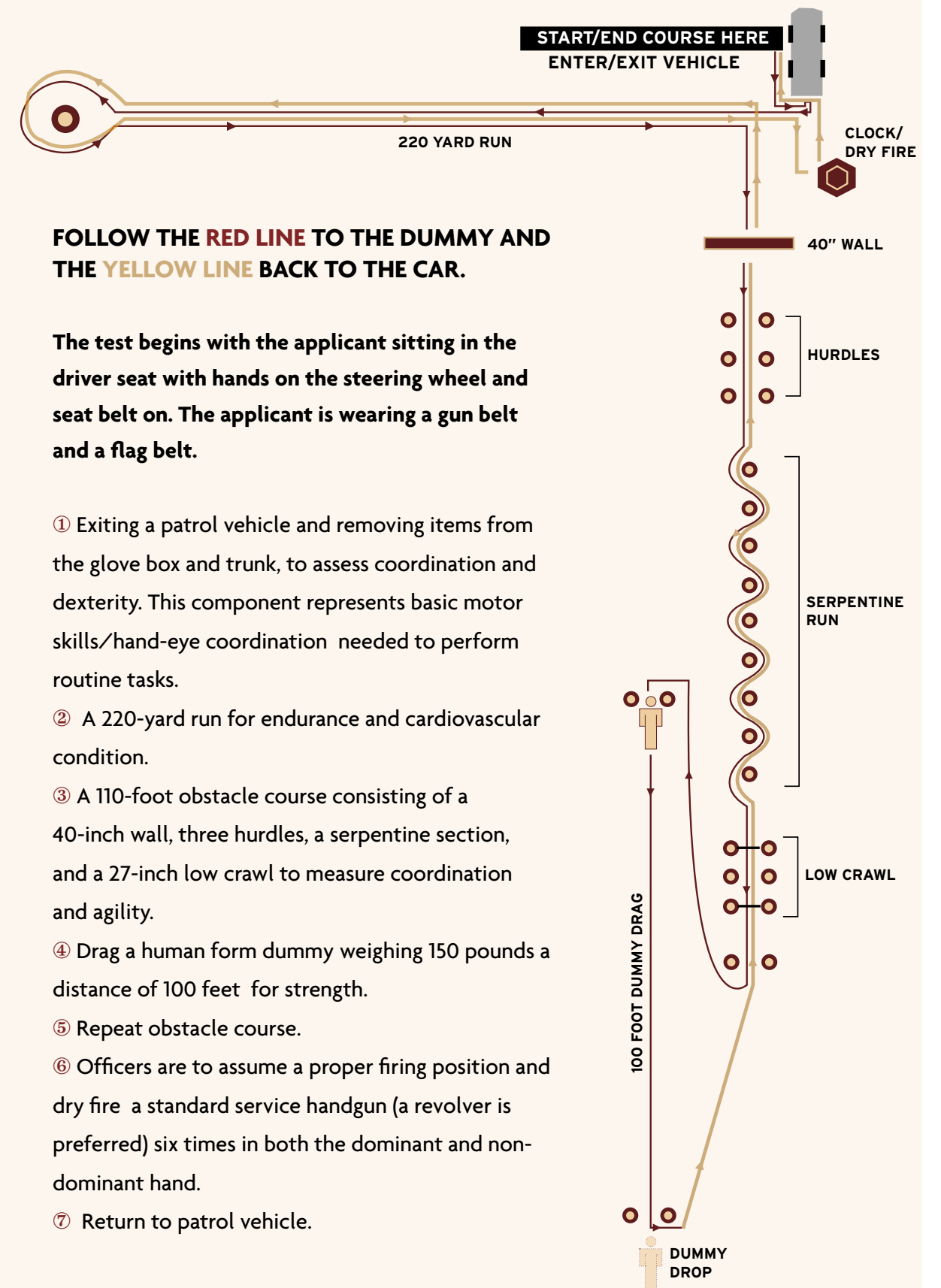
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## ST. PETERSBURG POLICE DEPARTMENT PHYSICAL ABILITIES TEST



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