

# Guess who?

The clothes an offender wears at the time they commit a crime can serve as a crucial clue to officers tracking down suspects. A new computer identification system works like a sophisticated game of *Guess Who?* by dressing suspects electronically and helping to capture them. John Dean reports.



**New technology allows police officers to build a picture of a suspect**

 It was a terrible crime, an unprovoked attack on a baby girl in her pushchair as her mother pushed her along a town street. Among the officers beginning their inquiries into the incident in Middlesbrough, in North East England, was a detective constable using a technology weapon which increasing numbers of forces are finding invaluable.

The incident was the first real test in Cleveland for Clothe-IT, the computer identification system recently acquired by the force. The system allows witnesses and officers to construct a clear image of exactly what the offender was

wearing at the time of the crime, which can then be distributed to officers or the media.

In the Middlesbrough case the image was released of an e-fit showing the youth who tried to snatch ten-month-old Sarah Ali in August. Police hope it will get them closer to a suspect.

Mother Yasmin Ali had been approached by the youth, who appeared to be drunk or under the influence of drugs. He tried to snatch Sarah before punching her in the stomach and face and making his escape down the street. Later, Yasmin sat down with detectives and described the man and worked with DC Weightman,

using Clothe-IT to reproduce an image for release to the media.

Cleveland Police believes the system will be particularly useful when dealing with street incidents like the attack on Sarah and also bogus official crimes against elderly people, who often struggle to remember faces but can recall clothing in great detail.

Clothe-IT is a development of the E-Fit system, the software programme which allows police officers to draw on a vast database of facial types in producing images of offenders.

This system goes one step further, allowing officers to summon up an array of clothing types

and fashion accessories as well as a range of weapons and fit them onto a full body computer-generated image.

Thousands of images are contained on the computer programme, which is accessed via a laptop and can be taken out to witnesses' homes.

Force forensic advisor DC Weightman said: 'E-fit, which builds up the face of a suspect, has been used by us for many years. Clothe-IT allows us to create a complete profile of a suspect.

'Speaking to, and working with a witness, we can create the build and height of an individual,

the clothes they were wearing, the fashion logos displayed on it, any accessories being carried and, of course, any weapons which the person had.

'The system is portable, operating on a laptop, and about 95 per cent of our E-fit work is being carried out in witnesses' homes.'

The system starts by producing the basic figure of a person, either male front or back, with the frontal views the ones used most often by witnesses. The height and weight of the offender can be changed and initially the figure is presented in their underwear.

Witnesses can then choose from a wide range of trousers, skirts and dresses as well as the likes of overalls and tops, including football shirts. Although presented in black-and-white, they can all be coloured in if required.

DC Weightman, a scenes of crimes officer, said: 'The football tops are particularly useful when dealing with football hooligans. For instance, Middlesbrough are playing again in Europe this season and the system would be available if we need to use it in that context.'

An important aspect of the system is the accessories that can be added on-screen because they are often the little things which stick out most in witnesses' minds. These include a huge database of company logos.

DC Weightman said: 'This is particularly useful in cases when we are dealing with bogus officials who have committed crimes against elderly people. The elderly person may not know what the logo represents but they can describe it and we can show them a range of logos to let them select.'

'For instance, one elderly person recently described a logo which sounded like the Adidas one. However, the person was adamant that it was not Adidas. By looking at other logos, we were able to identify it as another similar one.'

Having produced an image of the person's clothing, the system can then add other accessories, including hats, among them baseball caps turned backwards, hoods, spectacles and rucksacks.

DC Weightman said: 'Rucksacks are particularly useful if you are dealing with cases like the bombings in London, where the rucksacks were a key feature.'



The system can also include umbrellas, cans of beer, weapons such as handguns, machine guns and knives, and tools like hammers and spanners.

Tool images may be particularly useful: one recent scam in Cleveland, for instance, involves gangs offering to cut an elderly person's hedge. The criminals then claim their hedge trimmer is broken, elicit money from the pensioner on the pretext of getting it repaired, then disappear with the cash never to be seen again.

Indeed, DC Weightman believes that much of the Clothe-IT work will be for the Operation Strongbow team, a region-wide operation headed by Cleveland police officers.

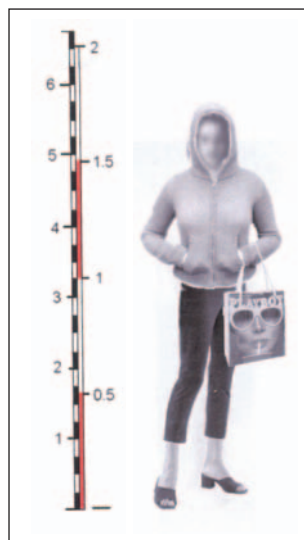
The Strongbow team liaises with colleagues in other northern areas to help track the travelling gangs of bogus officials who target elderly victims around the region and into Yorkshire.

Strongbow has already achieved striking results, with reductions in incidents and a number of significant arrests and prosecutions.

DC Weightman believes Clothe-IT will prove itself invaluable to carry on the work.

He said: 'Clothe-IT is another weapon for us and I expect us to use it Strongbow a lot of the time. The elderly person confronted by the bogus official may not be able to remember the face but they can remember what the person was wearing.'

He also believes it will be useful in creating images of street robbers and attackers, as in the Sarah Ali case.



He said: 'I prepared an E-fit with her mother fairly early on but a few days later I went back and she was able to remember a lot about what he was wearing.'

'A lot of witnesses may not be able to give us a good facial description, but they can provide

a detailed body profile, which can go a long way to catching the person we are looking for.'

Det con Sonja Whittingham, of Middlesbrough CID, who is leading the investigation, said: 'Clothe-IT allows us to produce an image which has more of a human appearance. It means we can produce a more rounded image of the person rather than an alien-looking face peering out.'

'It is also useful when preparing to search suspects' houses because we can brief the search team about exactly what pieces of clothing they are searching for.'

'The system is invaluable and is a good spin-off from what we have available on E-Fit.'

Jean Bennett, company secretary of the company marketing the product, said the type of information contained on Clothe-IT used to exist as part of the company's E-Fit database.

However, when E-Fit was redesigned 18 months ago the company created a totally separate database dealing with clothing, which has been further developed.

She said: 'The majority of Clothe-IT users use it in conjunction with E-Fit. You can produce a face then put a smaller version of it onto a body. In addition to front images, we can also produce a back view of the suspects.'

She added that 35 forces were now using the system: 'We are also getting a lot of interest from robbery squads for cases where witnesses perhaps did not see the face of the robbers but did see what they were wearing.'

**E-Fit is a computer-based facial composition system installed in 39 British police forces, including the Facial Identification Unit at New Scotland Yard. A further 25 countries use the system including the United States. It can create scars, spectacles, beards, age-lines and even hats and earrings to make the facial likeness as lifelike as possible.**

**Clothe-IT, an expansion of the original system, creates a full-length body likeness of a suspect as they appeared while committing a crime and is being used by increasing numbers of forces.**

**More information is available on the company website at <http://www.efit.co.uk>**