
Memphis Police use new electric scooters to keep peace

By Hank Dudding

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Memphis police officers have a new tool in their effort at community policing, one that can bring lawbreakers to justice as quickly as it can make passersby chuckle.

An officer aboard a T3 Series Personal Mobility Vehicle -- in essence, a three-wheeled scooter tricked out with police accoutrements -- can zip along streets and even sidewalks at speeds up to 20 mph, although that may be pushing the safety envelope, officers say.

Ten of the electric vehicles have been on Memphis streets for about three weeks, said Col. Johnny Currin, 55, precinct commander at Downtown's South Main Station. They're being used Downtown, in the Wolfchase area and the Poplar corridor around Oak Court Mall.

The scooters link police and the public by taking away the barrier created by a squad car, Currin said. "You feel closer to the citizens, and the citizens feel closer to you," he said.

Police officer Mary Webb, 39, who patrolled the Uptown neighborhood Wednesday afternoon aboard a T3, said the scooter gives her a crime-fighting edge.

Many people with criminal intentions aren't looking for a stealth officer on three wheels, she said. "One guy said, 'You got me. I didn't realize you were standing there watching me,'" she said.

People with more wholesome motives have flagged her down for photographs. "You find yourself doing a lot of public relations. There's more contact with the citizens," she said.

Leslie Lawhon, 28, who owns the Delphinium women's accessories boutique Downtown on G.E. Patterson, said she saw an officer on one of the scooters for the first time Wednesday.

"I feel like they're more approachable," she said. "I feel like I could yell out and, they'd hear me."

The scooters retail for about \$9,000, although they're not for sale to the public, said Neil Brooker, president of California-based T3 Motion.

In coming months, officers aboard scooters are likely to patrol even more areas, including Cooper-Young and Overton Park, said Currin, and people who attend local festivals like Memphis in May are likely to see them there as well.

Officer Webb, who wore a bicycle helmet and gloves in addition to her standard police uniform, said she's learned the hard way that sunglasses are a good idea too, "for the bugs and particles in the air."

Contact Hank Dudding at 529-2565. To read more stories on the Web by this reporter, go to commercialappeal.com, click on Contact Us at the top of the home page and then click on his name.



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