



Mesquite police use battery-powered three-wheelers to patrol mall parking lots

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Mesquite police are turning a lot of heads this holiday season as they patrol Town East Mall parking lots on futuristic tricycles.

"RoboCop" seems to be the most common comment when people see a helmeted officer on one of the battery-powered scooters, called T3s. And the department's spokesman, Lt. Steve Callerman, said kids young and old consider the vehicles "really cool."

The department's two T3s cost \$10,000 apiece, but the funds came not from taxpayers but from seized drug money.

"Our narcotics unit is very good," Lt. Callerman said.

Officers plan to use the three-wheelers, which resemble oversize Segways, to patrol the mall parking lots year round.

The manufacturer, California-based T3 Motion, says the vehicle "has been designed to tackle a host of daily professional functions, from community policing to patrolling of airports, military bases, campuses, malls, public event venues and other high-density areas."

In addition to their service at the mall, Mesquite's T3s have been used at high school football games. At one recent game, Lt. Callerman said, an officer on a T3 defused a potential fight.

He said the department is still looking for other ways to use the vehicles, which he said have received "rave reviews."

Police Chief Gary Westphal became intrigued with the T3s after seeing them demonstrated at a police convention in Florida.

"Our chief is very pro-technology," Lt. Callerman said. "He's always thinking out of the box."

Jimmy Sikes, a Mesquite bicycle officer, was trained on the T3's features and limitations. He said the main drawback is that there is no reverse, but it isn't really needed, because the vehicles can turn on a dime, even from a dead stop. Officer Sikes said the height an officer gets as he rides standing on a T3 is important.



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Mesquite Police Officer Philip Clay demonstrates one of the T3 electric vehicles that the department is using in Town East Mall parking lots. T3s can turn on a dime, make officers more visible and keep the officers from tiring during a chase.

"People can really see you on these," he said. "The visual part is huge."

Officer Sikes said he wouldn't mind riding one regularly, though he likes the exercise he gets from his police mountain bike.

Lt. Callerman, however, said not having to use pedal power can be an advantage. If an officer on a bike had to catch up with a running suspect, he would become winded, the lieutenant said. But on the T3, an officer could catch up and have energy to spare for making the apprehension.

The T3s aren't cut out for auto chases – their top speed is only about 25 mph. But when maneuvering in the mall's packed parking lots is essential, Lt. Callerman said, a T3 is a "much faster, safer" way than a squad car to reach the destination.

"We take holiday-shopping safety very seriously," he said.

Officers are required to wear helmets and reflective gear when riding T3s at night; the busiest times at the mall are after 6 p.m., Lt. Callerman said. The T3s also get a lot of use on weekends.

Lt. Callerman said he knows of no other area department that uses the vehicles.

The Mesquite department hopes to get two more next year, also bought with seized drug money.

"It is one more tool to fight crime," Lt. Callerman said. "If we find new, improved ways of doing our job, we'll take advantage of it."