



Campus police use crime-fighting chariot

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It's a super scooter. A high-tech chariot. A Segway on steroids, even.

You can call the T3 a lot of things, but remember this - it's also the latest peacekeeping tool for the Cal State San Bernardino Police Department.

It also illustrates how campuses are looking for more ways to protect themselves.

"It's fun to drive, it's quiet, and it's easy to drive," said Officer Julie Barbo-Garcia, who is trained to patrol the campus on it. "I'm used to it now, but the reactions of the students who see it for the first time were a lot like mine - they're like, 'What ... is that?'"

CSUSB students aren't the only ones wondering that. The T3 is in use at UCLA, USC and UC Riverside.

In reality, the T3 is just one way to increase the concept of community policing and awareness of the presence of law enforcement.

That kind of awareness is something that's being worked on at other Inland Empire campuses, especially in light of events such the tragic shootings at Virginia Tech.

David Ramirez, chief of police for Chaffey College, said the Rancho Cucamonga school is examining other ways to help people "get the word out" about campus emergencies.

"We're looking at a text messaging system. People can enroll in the service, and if something's happening on campus, a message gets sent to your phone," he said. "We're also looking at on-campus systems. ... We're testing out pop-ups, where we could push a message through to all campus computers that are still on."

As far as Cal State San Bernardino goes, seeing an officer perched high on something like the T3 can also provide positive results.

"It's a natural deterrent," said CSUSB police Lt. Walter Duncan. "When there's a greater sense of police presence, crime goes down."

The concept of presence was one of the driving forces behind the design of the machine, said Neil Brooker, president of T3 Motion, the Costa Mesa-based company that produces the T3.

"They can see everything, and people can see them," he said. "It's designed to look purposeful and approachable - it's a good way to increase relationships with the community."

The vehicle itself is also a good way to move around a college campus. It's top speed is 20 miles per hour, and it has a zero turning radius - which means it can turn around in an elevator.

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"It's small enough to go inside buildings, and it's not intrusive on the sidewalks," Duncan said. "It can cut response time in half."

But the one thing it doesn't deter is attention. Anyone who sees it has to ask about it, said Barbo-Garcia.

"Practically everyone wants a ride," she said. "Sometimes, I'll turn off the little key and let people stand on it. But they can't drive it."

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