

It's electric! Check out this ride

Postal Service experiments in Key West

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Posted - Saturday, October 25, 2008 08:23 AM EDT

Key West residents who live on Caroline and Eaton streets, or anywhere in between, may do a double-take when they see the U.S. Postal Service's new high-tech, eco-friendly delivery vehicle.

Called the T3, the Key West post office is one of only six in the nation participating in the trial of what may become the standard of mail delivery in residential areas that now see their carriers walk door to door.

"It's a little more convenient with the alleys here in Key West," said letter carrier, test driver and Key West native Chaz Cervantes. "The movability around town, you don't have to wait for cars."

The new vehicle, the T3, is an upright, three-wheeled vehicle that can cruise on the sidewalk with a max speed of 12 mph. It's been designed to have a zero-degree turn radius and is specially modified to carry mail.

"I think they'd be perfect for in town," Cervantes said as he tucked letters into the mailbox of an Eaton Street home without getting off his vehicle. But the best part? "I get a longer lunch break," joked Cervantes, who is finishing his route more quickly with the new delivery vehicle.

A California-based company called T3 Motion, which has already sold more than 1,000 units to various law enforcement agencies and the military, manufactures the vehicle.

"We approached the ... Postal Service about clean energy," said Brian Buccella, T3 Motion vice president of sales and marketing. He went on to explain that the vehicle costs about 15 cents in electricity to be fully charged.

"It reduces the carbon footprint," he said.

South Florida Postal Service spokeswoman Debbie Fetterly said that while the vehicle is good for letter carriers, the real appeal is the environmental aspect.

"We're trying to find more ways to be more energy efficient," she said Fetterly. "We're very energy conscious."

"This is all part of going green," said Bob Rademacher, the Postal Service's delivery supervisor for Key West.

Key West has a 2003 law on the books that bans the use of the brand-name, two-wheeled Segway from use on Old Town streets and sidewalks, but that probably won't be a problem, City Manager Jim Scholl said.

"It's not a Segway," Scholl said, "but it's certainly a mobile platform." Scholl said T3 will likely prompt debate over whether the law applies specifically to Segways or generally to any similar vehicle.

"I guess it's something that has to be reviewed. The lawyers will have to fight it out."

Fetterly said she understands that the law applies only to Segways and the ordinance would not affect the vehicle testing.

The all-electric T3 is being tested in Key West, St. Augustine, California and Arizona.