

Hot wheels in Lakewood

Local: Sheriff's new T3 units patrol the mall, garner stares; `You guys got dubs!'

By Karen Robes, Staff writer

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LAKESWOOD -

The T3s that have come to town may not bear any resemblance to Arnold Schwarzenegger's Terminator, but they may help stop the bad guys.



The T3 Motion Series Mobility Units are the city's latest crimefighting tools, helping deputies at the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Lakewood Station patrol parks, business complexes and shopping areas, including Lakewood Center mall.

"When people see this coming down the street, it really draws their attention and it is an excellent addition to our ... suppression efforts," said Lt. Terry Benjestorf. "The visibility is what we're going for."

The city purchased two T3s for \$20,869 after the Sheriff's Technology Division featured the electric vehicles at the Contract Cities Association Seminar last May. Lakewood is among the first stations locally with the new vehicles. Palmdale got a pair of T3s about a week ago to patrol the Antelope Valley Mall.

"I think they generate interest from the public, seeing deputies on them, and it definitely increases their mobility," said Palmdale Station's Lt. Robert Johnsen. Stationed at the Lakewood mall's Community Safety Center, the T3s have alloy rims, a hydraulic brake system, front-wheel drive, electric motor, sirens and front and tail lights.

The T3 has two speeds - a low speed that maxes at 10 mph and a high speed that tops at about 20 to 25 mph, depending on the weight of the driver and travel surface. Officials said the T3s, which are used daily at the mall, have been well-received by the public.

"The first thing that you see is the oohs and aahs when you see the Sheriff's (deputies) riding them," said Annette Bryant, senior marketing manager at Lakewood Center. "The kids say, `Cool! You guys got dubs!'" said Deputy Monica Botello, who is assigned to Lakewood Center. "They all like it. They all say it looks cool."

Employees at businesses such as the nearby Dr. Scheffel's Vision Center also get a kick out of the T3s. "It looks like they're from `The Jetsons' cartoon or something," said receptionist Joyce Cobilla. "It's kind of different to see somebody voooshhh by."

Botello said having the T3s allows her to cover the mall's 1.2 million square feet of space in a short time.

"I particularly like it because it gives us a good vantage point inside the mall and outside in the parking lots," she said. "We can really see and get a good glimpse of what's going on, which is beneficial for us and the safety of everyone."

"Sometimes patrol can get kind of hot in here. ... Now that we can just zip around here, it's great. We love it."

Karen Robes can be reached at karen.robres@presstelegram.com or (562) 499- 1303.