

# Athens-Clarke police department testing out electric ride

## Between a Segway and a scooter



Athens-Clarke police Sgt. W.R. Smith waves to a motorist while patrolling downtown on the department's new T3 electric scooter. The scooter is equipped with blue lights and a siren and can go a full eight-hour shift on a single charge.

**John Curry / Staff**



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You might call Athens-Clarke police Sgt. W.R. Smith "Spartacus."

At least one shop owner made that comparison Monday, Smith's first day patrolling downtown on the police department's T3, an electric scooter that looks a little like a chariot.

"Some people have laughed, but they're more laughing with you because it's a new piece of equipment that they've never seen before," Smith said.

The police department announced this month that it had bought the \$9,000 electric scooter along with four hybrid sedans to save fuel.

The white three-wheeler sports blue stripes, lights and a siren, and can go a full eight-hour shift on a single charge, Smith said.

The T3 can top out at 25 mph, he said, but the Athens-Clarke police scooter is set so it goes only half that speed.

"It doesn't have any shock absorbers, so when you go over bumps and things at more than 12 mph, you'd beat your body to death," Smith said.

The T3 doesn't have a seat, so the driver stands.

Only a lieutenant and two sergeants assigned to downtown bicycle patrol now drive the scooter, though Smith said that soon will change.

"We can't just have supervisors riding on it and being tied up if we're needed, so other officers will be getting training on it," he said.

People downtown, or walking and biking the North Oconee River Greenway, have gotten occasional glimpses of the T3 scooter, as the three supervisors adjusted to the new equipment.

Smith chose to use the scooter Monday because of the intense heat, he said.

"I don't mind riding my bike to the greenway, but it's much better on a day like today when it's going to be 100 degrees," Smith said, during a break on College Avenue. "I enjoy riding it, but it's never going to take the place of my bicycle."

The temperature in Athens topped out at 99 degrees Monday, according to the National Weather Service.

Smith already is an imposing figure, a powerful man who stands more than 6 feet tall. He caught glances and even a few horn honks as he cruised downtown on the scooter's 9-inch-high platform.

"Hey, Sgt. Smith, have you popped any wheelies on that yet?" one man shouted.

Pedestrians stopped him for directions, and one man flagged down Smith to ask how to file an accident report.

Athens-Clarke police first rolled out the T3 on July 4 during the Bishop Park fireworks display, and police officials said they planned to use the scooter for crowd control at special events.

Lt. Gary Epps, the department's downtown operations supervisor, rode the T3 during its inaugural outing.

"Some people said it's the coolest thing they've ever seen, and some people have laughed at it," Epps said. "But mostly people have a lot of questions about it, and we're happy to answer them."

Police can run the scooter for pennies a day, and a single charge will last an entire eight-hour shift, Smith said.

The scooter joined the police fleet at the same time the force acquired four Toyota Prius hybrid sedans - at a cost of \$24,000 each - which get about 48 miles per gallon, compared to the estimated 15 miles per gallon for older-model police cars.

The hybrids will be used only for administrative business, and not patrol, police said.

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