



A dark red rectangular graphic with a gold swoosh at the bottom. The text "Become an Elite Leader" is written in white, bold, sans-serif font.

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N.J. tests motorized 'chariots' for police

Vehicles could cut costs, provide more interaction with public

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By Denisa R. Superville
The Herald News

PATERSON, N.J. — If Police Officer Alfredo Guzman looked like he was having too much fun on the job, he was.

On Tuesday, Guzman was able to ditch his regular motorcycle and cruise the city's downtown in a white, electric-powered, three-wheeled personal mobility vehicle called a T3.

"It beats walking around," he said. "It's pretty comfortable."

Faced with the high cost of gasoline and calls for increased police patrols in neighborhoods plus a desire to reduce carbon emissions, the city Police Department is looking into purchasing at least six of these vehicles, Police Director Michael Walker said.

But before Walker makes the decision, he borrowed a demonstration model to find out firsthand how well it will work in Paterson. The T3 sells for nearly \$9,000.

The T3, which is manufactured by California-based T3 Motion Inc., looks like a motorized chariot.

The driver stands at the controls and holds on to the handlebars. The high floor elevates the officer above pedestrians' heads and allows pedestrians to see the officer. The machine is powered by rechargeable electric batteries that last for about 12 hours.

The three-wheeled vehicles can reach maximum speeds of between 20 and 25 miles an hour, and could cost as little as 10 cents a day to operate, according to the company.

"It's a nice little vehicle," Walker said. "It gives the police officer a much heightened view of the surroundings. You can go from one place to another very quickly, and it does not take any gas, which is our favorite thing, given the price of gas right now."

Walker said he will look for grants, possibly through the Urban Enterprise Zone, to purchase the vehicles, if the department decides to do so after reviewing officer comments.

If the department decides to buy, it may forgo buying "a couple of police cars" and get a few T3s instead, using money in the department's budget, Walker said.

Since the vehicle was introduced in 2006 at the International Association of Chiefs of Police Conference - where

Walker first saw the model - thousands of them have been sold to police departments and private security across the country, said the company's president, Neil Brooker, by telephone Tuesday from Costa Mesa, Calif.

A spokesman for the New York Police Department said the department is experimenting with about three T3s.

The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department has 16 T3s that it uses at malls, community colleges, parades and festivals, according to a deputy sheriff's officer at the department.

Walker said the T3 offers more opportunity for police interaction with the public.

"The problem with the police [cars] is that you are in a cocoon. You don't always take in what's surrounding you," Walker said. "With the T3, you are with the people - you are not locked in a cocoon called a police car. You are more accessible."

But, there is only so much that one can do while riding a T3.

"You're not going to do a pursuit in this vehicle, unless it's someone on foot," Brooker said. "You are not going to be chasing someone down in a T3, but it was not really designed for that. You identify the vehicle that you're chasing and let the squad car pick it up from there."

On Tuesday, Guzman stood at the intersection of Main Street and Broadway and directed traffic from his T3.

Emergency vehicles had converged at the intersection, interrupting traffic flow, after a woman complained of chest pains, officials said.

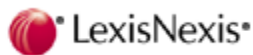
Curious city residents came up to him and asked about the T3 or stopped on the sidewalk to take a look.

"That's unique. It's something different," said Cody Best, 50, an organist at Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church on Pearl Street, as he angled for a better look. "I guess the maneuverability is good. I don't know what kind of pursuit vehicle it would be, but it looks 'green' enough."

Best said he would be in favor of the Police Department's purchasing a few T3s.

"As long as they can fund them off of confiscated or ill-gotten cash, that's good," he said. "Our tax dollars are busy enough already."

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