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Vehicle helps medical workers at Reno special events

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Special events such as Street Vibrations, the recent Reno National Championship Air Races, Best in the West Nugget Rib Cook-off, Burning Man and Hot August Nights draw large crowds.

That can make it difficult for medical personnel responding to an emergency. Maneuvering through shoulder-to-shoulder crowds in a Gator utility vehicle, or even on bicycles, can be time-consuming, when seconds can mean life or death.

For the past year, Regional Emergency Services Authority paramedics have used a tool that has saved lives.

Paramedics can ride a T3, a three-wheeled vehicle with a deck about 9 inches above ground that paramedics steer with handlebars. It can carry medical gear, has lights and sirens and can reach a maximum speed of 25 mph.

Officials said REMSA, which has two, is the only medical services unit in the world using the device that costs about \$8,000. Law enforcement and private security companies have been the primary users of the vehicle.

REMSA debuted the T3 at Hot August Nights in 2007 and saw immediate positive results, said Alan Tom, special events coordinator for the agency.

"We had two cardiac incidents where we ended up with saves on them," he said. "We were able to get through the crowd so much easier than with the Gator."

A few weeks later, at the Reno Air Races, the T3 again made the difference when a fan went into cardiac arrest. The paramedics on the T3 were the first to arrive and treated the patient.

Paramedic Charlie Tabano, who operated one of the T3s that day, said being a few inches above the crowd enables paramedics to see better and the lights and sirens part the crowd.

"We've tried a lot of different things over the years, and these are by far the best," he said.

Tom said the relatively small size and maneuverability of the T3s allow paramedics to take them into buildings, such as hotels, into elevators and down the hallways and directly to rooms.

The T3s run on batteries and can travel about 50 miles on a charge.

Tom said it takes about three minutes to train someone to operate the vehicle. He said the top speed can be adjusted.