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Riverside police add T3 scooters to patrol arsenal

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RIVERSIDE – Two new battery-powered standup scooters that Riverside police will use to patrol downtown were demonstrated Thursday outside City Hall.

The T3 scooters – similar to Segways – will be added to the bicycle and car units that currently patrol the Main Street plaza, White Park and the marketplace, said Riverside police Lt. Chuck Griffiths.

The white scooters with black lettering and zero emissions are more visible than bicycles and cause less fatigue during operation, he said.

“When an officer steps onto the T3, he adds 10 inches of height,” Griffiths said. “He can see into a crowd from the outside. He doesn't have to dismount to talk to anybody.

“There's less physical exercise than riding a bike because it's motorized, and rather than driving down the street in a cruiser with the air conditioning on and windows up, the officer is interacting with people, which is what we strive for,” he added.

The three-wheel, 240-pound T3s were put through a series of maneuvers during a 30-minute demonstration Thursday morning outside City Hall. Officers Javier Cabrera and Scott Levesque showed off the scooters' speed, peeling out as they accelerated down a sidewalk at 20 mph, with lights flashing and sirens blaring.

The officers also demonstrated the T3's zero turn radius – a necessary attribute since the units are not capable of going into reverse.

“Our officers at the Galleria Mall at Tyler (Street) thought there'd be a lot of advantages to having them over there,” Griffiths said. “UC Riverside is looking at them. That's a perfect situation, too, with the campus and sidewalks.”

The T3s are virtually silent and can run for 10 hours at a time, after a three- to four-hour charge. If a unit is needed for a quick turnaround, Griffiths said, the vehicle's titanium battery can be swapped for a spare in minutes.

Irvine-based T3 Motion manufactures the scooters, for which Riverside paid \$10,300 apiece, said Janis Penner of the Riverside Downtown Partnership.

The partnership, made up of centrally located businesses, provided half the funds needed for the purchase, she said.

The police department's T3s were more expensive than the manufacturer's base models because Riverside requested all the “bells and whistles,” including lights, sirens and speakers, she said.

Officials considered adding Segways to the police department's fleet two years ago, after the two-wheel upright vehicles began to be used by the city's parking enforcement department, but the idea was scrapped because of the Segway's handling characteristics, Griffiths said.

“You have to step off and find a place to lean a Segway,” Griffiths said. “You're constantly balancing the thing, and we heard from officers in other jurisdictions complaining about ankle fatigue.”

The T3s will be used mainly for 10-hour daytime patrols, although they have headlights and may be deployed for night operations later, he said.

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