

Police take a spin in futuristic 'chariot'

By **Tom Dalton**

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SALEM, Mass. — Police Capt. Brian Gilligan is a nice enough fellow but has never been confused with the Pied Piper.

That was hard to believe Tuesday, when Gilligan drove around the city, turning heads and drawing crowds wherever he went. He was surrounded by high school students on the Essex Street pedestrian mall, drew a flock of kids in The Point neighborhood and answered an endless stream of questions at the basketball court on Salem Common.

Gilligan, a 14-year veteran, would be the first to admit that he was not the attraction. It was the vehicle he was driving while standing up | something called a T3.

"You look like RoboCop," said Fidel Pimentel, 20, as Gilligan pulled the three-wheeled vehicle into a parking lot next to Mary Jane Lee Park.

A car full of teenagers stopped in the middle of a side street by the park to gawk.

"Wow, that's crazy," said Alex Francisco, 20. "It's hilarious."

The T3 looks a lot like a Segway human transporter, the two-wheeled, self-balancing device that made a smash debut in 2001. This vehicle, however, has three wheels, weighs 240 pounds and looks more like a chariot for a modern-day Ben Hur.

This 21st-century police vehicle was unveiled last fall in Boston at the convention of the International Association of Chiefs of Police. The Los Angeles Police Department has bought several, and they are also being used by police in Florida and Alabama, according to the manufacturer.

The T3 made its New England debut Tuesday in Witch City.

"We have to take our hats off to Segway," said Neil Brooker, the president of T3Motion of Irvine, Calif.

"They introduced the whole concept of stand-up mobility."

Salem hasn't decided if it's going to buy a T3, which costs just under \$8,000. But it's taking a serious look at getting one for community policing.

"It's an icebreaker," Gilligan said. "People who might not normally speak with police might with this kind of vehicle."

The battery-powered and virtually silent T3 can go anywhere a bike can go but carries more gear, rapidly reaches speeds of 25 miles per hour, and doesn't leave an officer huffing and puffing when he gets to his destination. It also goes indoors.

"I actually took it inside Museum Place Mall," Gilligan said. "You're supposed to be able to drive it into an elevator and turn it around."

While in The Point, Gilligan demonstrated the turning ability to several youngsters, making a 360-degree turn while practically staying in place.

The T3 is here for a two-week trial. A company representative will arrive today to demonstrate its operation and answer questions.

Mayor Kim Driscoll and City Council President Matt Veno both took it for a spin yesterday | and were impressed. The mayor said it could have uses in congested neighborhoods near the downtown.

She's not so sure, however, if it's a smart move politically.

"I'm putting the helmet on," Driscoll said, "and thinking, 'This didn't go well for (Michael) Dukakis.'"

Tom Dalton writes for the Salem News of Salem, Mass.

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Photos



Salem, Mass.: Salem Police Capt. Brian Gilligan chats with Angel Vazquez, 6, while test-driving a battery-operated T3 Motion Scooter the department is thinking of purchasing to navigate the sidestreets in Salem' and to help promote community policing in the city's busier neighborhoods. "It's so different, but it brings you closer to people, so much closer than a cruiser," said Capt. Gilligan. The T3 Motion can reach speeds of 25mph, and features a 0 degree turning radius. Tuesday, May 1, 2007 Matthew Viglianti/Salem News.