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Scooters provide a leg up

COPS ON WHEELS

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Earlier this week, police officer Tom McCloghry was searching for a man who had stolen a radio from a stand outside the Columbia Marriott.

"In 20 minutes, I was able to cover the post office, Finlay Park and the bus stop (at Sumter and Laurel streets)," said McCloghry, master patrol officer with the Columbia Police Department.

McCloghry was able to zip in and out of traffic quickly thanks to the T3 Motion — think a three-wheeled Segway scooter on steroids — he uses to get around downtown.

"On foot? Forget about it. It would have taken me hours."

City Center Partnership, a nonprofit organization that represents downtown businesses, donated two T3 Motion scooters to the Police Department earlier this month using money from hospitality tax, president Matt Kennell said.

"We wanted to make people feel really good about coming downtown," Kennell said.

The scooter is a conversation piece, McCloghry said. People want to know what it is, why he's riding it, and whether they can ride, too.

McCloghry said he'll let people stand in the scooter, but not drive it.

The T3s were the product of a safety plan the City Center Partnership drafted with the Police Department, Kennell said. They retail for \$8,000 apiece.

The idea was to improve safety and the perception of security in downtown, he said.

City Council granted the group \$90,000 in hospitality tax money to support a downtown public safety plan. The money also was used to buy a Polaris Ranger all-terrain vehicle and an environmentally friendly golf cart. Other money will go toward additional manpower.

During the day, the Ranger is used to water plants downtown. At night, private, unarmed security guards patrol in it, Kennell said. The golf cart also doubles as a shuttle.

The T3 Motion was officially rolled out at the 2006 International Association of Chiefs of Police and went on sale in March.

They are available only to law enforcement, military and private security, said Costa Mesa, Calif.-based company president Neil Brooker.

They are used by the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department, the John Wayne Airport in Orange County, Calif., and law enforcement in Miami and Alabama, he said.

T3s are ideal for places with a lot of foot traffic, like shopping malls, airports and college campuses.

The 9-inch platform increases the officer's presence in a crowd, Brooker said.

"We're hearing officers are getting flagged down because people can see them in the distance," he said.

The scooter comes standard with lights, sirens and headlights that double as a spotlight and can include a Global Positioning System. It can reach speeds of up to 25 miles per hour and has a 25-mile range on its lithium polymer battery. A third wheel gives the scooter added stability.

McCloghry said he has gotten up to 24 mph going downhill.

Brooker said that in the future the scooters might include a license plate scanner.

"We're listening to the customer to see how they're using the vehicle," he said.

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