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Police test a new set of wheels

September 28, 2006 | By CINDY CARCAMO

It looks like a tricycle pumped up on steroids. A sleek BMW motorcycle but not as cool. A scooter from the future.

It's called a T3 Series.

And law enforcement agencies across the county are testing out the vehicles, touted as the newest way for beat officers on foot to get around quickly without running out of breath.

The vehicle is quiet enough to sneak up on a thief, turns on a dime and zooms to 25 mph.

It's ideal for catching "bad guys" on foot, said Costa Mesa Lt. Allen Huggins, who ditched his squad car last month for a trial run on the T3 Series.

But it's not perfect.

Costa Mesa police decided not to use the device because it's too fat. The T3 can't fit into a standard closet.

"If we can't store it, we can't keep it," Huggins said.

Neil Brooker, president of Irvine-based T3 Motion, which makes the vehicles, wants to know about the kinks. What works? What needs improvement?

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KEVIN SULLIVAN, THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

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Hi-tech tools

Police and security agencies have looked to motorized people movers as a patrol vehicle. First, it was the Segway and now the T3 Series. The Segway uses gyroscopes and tilt sensors, while the T3 Series uses more conventional technology, similar to an electric scooter. Here is a comparison between the two:

Segway I2 Police

Speed: up to 12.5 mph

Weight: 105 pounds

Endurance: up to 24 miles on a single charge

Handling: zero-degree turning radius

Power: two rechargeable batteries

Cost to operate: 15 to 25 cents a day

Price: about \$5,495

T3 Series

It will help him build a better T3 in time for its October launch, he said.

Brooker said the T3 is meant to fill a gap left in the wake of the Segway recall last month.

For their part, Segway officials said that the recall is for a needed software upgrade and that their product is still competitive.

Devices like the T3 aren't designed to replace conventional policing tools but instead augment them, Brooker said.

The bicycle, horse and squad car will keep their place in law enforcement. A bicycle, for instance, can get through narrower places where a T3 can't go.

It's a niche product - a midpoint between a bicycle and a squad car. Currently, anyone can buy a Segway, but the T3 is not available to the general public.

The T3 is ideal for high-density areas, Brooker said. Recently, Costa Mesa police glided on T3s to watch over celebrations for the opening of Segerstrom Hall.

The device is envisioned for campuses and large facilities usually patrolled by foot.

Security officers normally walk or ride a bicycle to get around such facilities. Often officers are already tired before arriving at a destination, said Gerry White, national sales manager and retired Newport Beach traffic investigator.

T3's three wheels would change that, White says.

"When you get to the scene you're still as fresh as you were when you first responded to that call," he said. "You want to have your pulse rate as close as normal as possible in case of a critical situation."



Speed: up to 25 mph

Weight: 240 pounds

Endurance: up to 25 miles on a single charge

Handling: zero-degree turning radius

Power: two rechargeable batteries

Cost to operate: about 10 cents a day

Price: about \$6,000

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