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Hoover police getting 10 speedy scooters for crowd patrol

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Hoover police Officer Ted Davis has worked bicycle patrol at the Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament before, but he used a different set of wheels this year.

The Hoover City Council voted last week to buy 10 personal mobility vehicles for \$7,588 apiece. Police officers ride the battery-powered, three-wheel vehicles - called T3s - standing on an 8-inch-high platform. The T3s can go 25 mph and turn on a dime.

Davis said they allow officers to move through crowds quickly and in fresh condition for emergencies and disturbances.

"Instead of being tired when you get there from pedaling, you're just fine," Davis said. "All you've got to be able to do is work the brake and accelerator."

The decision to buy the T3s came after the city tested two of them during the Regions Charity Classic golf tournament. The same two T3s were used at the baseball tournament at Regions Park.

Davis, who stands 5 feet 6, said the 8-inch platform is an important feature that allows him to see over crowds. The height also serves to make sure people see the officer.

"For crowd control, it's essential for the officer to be able to project authority and also be approachable," Hoover police Assistant Chief A.C. Roper said.

Chief Nick Derzis and Roper first saw the vehicles at a police conference in Boston in October. Roper said the department wanted a new vehicle to use at special events, schools and other places where officers work in crowds.

"They allowed us to test two of them at our two most high-profile events of the year," Roper said.

Davis and Officer Chris Hunter said the T3s are easy to ride and proved ideal for working the crowd at the Regions Charity Classic. The sight of the vehicles sparked plenty of interest from golf fans, they said.

"They ask lots of questions, like, what's that and how fast does it go?" Davis said.

That curiosity from the public is an advantage because it helps officers build rapport with people, Roper said. "It seems to enhance community relations because people feel it is so easy to approach the officer," he said.

Hoover is one of at least three law enforcement agencies in Alabama planning to use T3s, which have been on the market less than a year.

The Alabama Department of Public Safety tested two T3s last week and will buy two for officers who patrol

the state Capitol complex, said department spokeswoman Dorris Teague. Gov. Bob Riley took one for a short spin at the Capitol, said his spokesman, Jeff Emerson.

The Montgomery Police Department has one T3 and plans to order more, said Jeff Simpson, marketing manager for T3 Motion Inc., the Irvine, Calif., company that builds the vehicles.

Simpson said the company plans to eventually produce a consumer model T3. For now, they are available only to law enforcement, the military and private security firms.

Other companies have similar products on the market. Hoover chose the T3s through a competitive bid process.

"The T3 really has a police presence that we found appealing," Roper said. "It projects authority."

The batteries hold a charge for eight to 12 hours and can be swapped out so there is no down time. T3s have front-wheel drive and rear brakes and can come to a full stop from 25 mph within 10 feet, Simpson said. They have emergency lights, a siren and a powerful headlamp that can be aimed in various directions. There is a storage pouch where the Hoover officers carry automated external defibrillators.

Roper said the city expects to receive the vehicles in about two months. Two probably will be assigned to Hoover and Spain Park high schools. Others will be used at other schools, sports events and at the Riverchase Galleria, Patton Creek or other large shopping centers, especially during Christmas season, he said.

Hoover will use money confiscated from illegal drug sales to buy the vehicles. "It's a good way to spend drug dealers' money," Councilman Jack Wright said.

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