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## Coolidge News

### Special vehicle dedicated to downtown beat

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**The Coolidge Police Department faced a conundrum as they considered how to better patrol the historic downtown district.**

**Keeping officers in cruisers? Too impersonal. Getting officers out of the patrol cars and on a foot beat? Too slow of a response time, and too much ground to cover.**



Staff photo by Brian Ahnmark, Officer Rick Hustad takes the T3 device for a spin in the Coolidge Police Station parking lot. This electric vehicle will help officers patrol the historic downtown district.

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How about stationing an officer on a futuristic three-wheeled scooter? That fits just right.

The Coolidge Police Department received its T3 personal electric vehicle in early August.

"No assembly required," said James Palmer, police chief. "It was delivered in a really big box."



The T3 is designed by T3Motion, a California-based company. The vehicle features a three-wheeled base for a balanced foundation. The Coolidge T3 is emblazoned with the department badge logo, and includes official police lights and a siren. The T3 can reach a top speed of 25 mph.

"This will be used strictly for pedestrian enforcement," Palmer said. "It won't be involved in traffic enforcement or chasing cars. If we need traffic enforcement, we'll call for a patrol car to assist."

The inspiration to purchase the T3 stemmed from last year's downtown revitalization study. In public surveys conducted by HyettPalma, a consulting firm that specializes in downtown revitalization, safety was a top community concern.

"A primary recommendation of that study was to boost the downtown visibility of the police department," Palmer explained. In response, the department budgeted for a full-time downtown officer. That position is not currently filled, since the department presently has a shortfall of 11 officers. But Officer Rick Hustad has expressed interest in the downtown beat, and is in line to work "one to two shifts a week" once the department can get the downtown beat off the ground. Palmer said the department will train three officers to drive the T3, with one officer assigned to the downtown beat on a regular basis.

"You don't need a motorcycle license, but there are inherent dangers," Palmer said. "As a pedestrian standing up and traveling 15 to 25 miles per hour, there is a chance of injury. We're interested in safety for ourselves and for the people of the community." Palmer said each T3 operator would be required to wear a safety helmet.

### Why a T3?

The zero degree turning radius of the T3 provides the benefit of unparalleled maneuverability, which will be critical in the bustling downtown of the future.

"This vehicle will enable officers to maneuver around people in the crowded place that we hope downtown will become," Palmer said. The T3 will also be put to use during local festivals such as Calvin Coolidge Days and Cotton Days.

"When you look at heavily populated areas, you usually see officers on a bike or a Segway," Palmer said. "But the Segway is a two-wheel vehicle, which requires quite a bit of coordination. This vehicle is more stable because of the three-point foundation."

But beyond the benefit of mobility, the police department hopes that the T3 will help make officers more approachable to members of the community.

"This type of vehicle puts an officer in close proximity with people, and allows for conversation," Palmer said.

"In a patrol car, we drive all day. It's not personal," Hustad added. To combat this perception, Hustad recently parked his cruiser downtown and checked doors on foot patrol.

"I had business owners saying, 'Wow! What are you doing? This is like the old days,'" Hustad recalled. "People liked the old beat officers on foot." Palmer said the department discussed the idea of a walking "foot" beat with HyettPalma, but

decided that the downtown district was big enough for a "motorized foot beat."

"It allows us to be more versatile," Palmer said. "Segways and golf carts are good alternatives, but for what we want to do, this is the best."

Hustad hopes to thwart criminal activity by establishing a rapport with downtown business owners and residents. He plans to schedule block watch meetings to employ the help of community members.

"An officer will hear a lot more suspicious sounds (on the T3), as opposed to patrolling in a car," Hustad said. "If there's breaking glass or loud voices, that might be a sign that a fight is brewing. If a dog is yipping in an alley, that might be a sign of a burglary. It's amazing what you can hear when you're out of your patrol car."

"I want to build trust with the public. A police officer is not a mean-looking person in a car; a police officer is a human who can talk."

Hustad hopes that a personal relationship between officers and citizens will help deter crime before it even happens.

"A personal rapport often results in police receiving more information from the public - from people who would otherwise never call or feed us bits of information," he said. "If you're in a car, that doesn't happen. This way, we're easier to track down. It will help us solve crimes and prevent crimes in the first place."

## **Specs**

The T3 cost \$9,000. The vehicle is battery powered, making it a clean energy vehicle with zero gas emissions. There are two batteries; one battery should cover an entire shift. Charging the batteries takes four hours.

The T3 officer will stand on an eight-inch raised platform for improved visibility. The vehicle is black and white, matching the Coolidge Police Department cruiser fleet. The T3 is controlled by a hand accelerator and hand brake, and includes headlights. With all-wheel drive, the T3 can climb over a curb with ease. The weight (sans officer) is roughly 240 pounds.

The department is aware that "T3" is not a particularly colorful name for this cutting-edge vehicle. However, officers understandably bristle when the T3 is described as a "scooter" or a "storm-trooper-mobile." Palmer said the department is considering a contest that would call on local schoolchildren to pick a name for the T3.

## **Future plans**

The police department is an integral part of the long-term downtown revitalization plan. New administrative government offices, currently in the planning stages, are expected to include a "simple police office" that would house the T3.

"Our plan is to add an officer each year for five years, so that we eventually have a five-officer team on a full-time, 24-hour, seven-day downtown beat," Palmer said. "That team will patrol from Main Street to Arizona Boulevard, and from Coolidge Avenue to Central Avenue." The addition of the T3 gives the

department a third transportation option (in addition to car and bicycle), allowing officers to select a mode of patrolling based on the assignment, the weather, and other factors.

"If it rains, the T3 officer will park the vehicle at the station and get a patrol car," Palmer said. "We are aware that (the T3) will be a target; people may try to damage or steal it, or pull the officer off. We'll just have to be careful to ensure that the vehicle is secure at all times."

Palmer said that if the downtown beat continues to grow as anticipated, the department may consider adding more T3 vehicles to the fleet.

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