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## Police get zippy new Segways

Half-dozen bought for patrols on L.B. streets.

By Tracy Manzer

Staff writer

LONG BEACH — They can travel faster than a running crook, zip up and down hills and make incredibly tight turns.

And they have a neat little bell that sounds a lot like the Good Humor Man.

They are the Long Beach Police Department's Bike Detail trying out their newest acquisition, six battery-operated Segway Human Transporters futuristic looking scooters that travel up to 12 mph and are designed for congested metropolitan areas.

Police took delivery of the six transporters last month and say so far they've been a big hit with the community downtown and provide officers with another method to quickly move in and out of crowds in heavily populated areas, including events like the Grand Prix, Gay Pride and the Jazz Festival.

The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department began using the devices about two years ago for patrols at Metropolitan Transportation Authority sites, including downtown L.A.'s Union Station, said Jason Stemmler, president of Segway Los Angeles.

A \$35,000 grant was used to purchase LBPD's six Segways, as well as carriers for the 83-pound transporters that will eventually be customized with the city's and Police Department's logo, said Sgt. Ernie Kohagura.



**Long Beach police Sgt. Ernie Kohagura** has fun with one of the department's new Segway Human Transporters.

Each of the units costs about \$4,500, Stemmler said.

Kohagura and one of the Bike Detail officers gave a small demonstration of the maneuverability and surprising zip packed by the environmentally friendly devices. They spun in tight circles, raced up grassy hills and zoomed forward and backward across the City Plaza.

Using gyroscopes and tilt sensors, the Segway is able to emulate human balance. When riders lean forward, the machine moves forward. If they ease back, it goes into reverse. To stop, they simply stand straight up. And if an officer has to bail off his contraption to chase a suspect up a staircase, or somewhere the Segway can't manage, the transporter will travel about 10 feet on its own before automatically shutting off.

For security purposes, each Segway must be activated with its own magnetic key and each comes with a locking system. It's an important addition, Kohagura notes, due to attempts to steal the department's mountain patrol bikes.

"We've had two bikes stolen in the 15 years that we've had the Bike Detail, one of which was found," Kohagura said. "I'm still looking for that other bike."

And like the bikes, Kohagura said, he expects the Segways will be modified to suit the officers' needs over time.

"We adapted the bikes so that they now have flashing red and blue lights on the front and a 120-decibel siren," the sergeant said. "We'll probably come up with something similar for these because right now we sound like an ice cream vendor."

About 20 officers have been through the two-hour training session to use the transporters, and it took about 30 minutes to an hour for each to get the hang of the Segways, he added.

"The biggest hurdle is trying to find your balance," Kohagura explained. "Once you do that, it's like riding a bike. It becomes second nature."