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Police: Segway-assisted cop nabs car thieves

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June 6, 2007

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Long Beach police have made their first Segway-assisted arrest, nabbing three juvenile car thieves after an officer gave chase aboard his two-wheeled, battery-powered Segway Personal Transporter.

At a top speed of 12.5 mph, the Segway was no match for the stolen Mercedes-Benz, but Officer Jose Miguez was able to keep the vehicle in sight for two blocks until the teens leaped out of the moving car to escape just moments before it jumped a curb and struck a utility pole.

"We went down one full block, we went up two of the short blocks and then another full block back," Miguez, 34, recalled Tuesday, balancing on the Segway outside police headquarters.

"I think it's important to note that it's typically a foot post. Had I been on foot, there's no way I could have caught up with this kid," said Miguez, who was a New York City police officer before joining the Long Beach force in 2001.

Long Beach got two Segways in early May, and police thought they would prove handy in patrolling the 2.2-mile-long boardwalk during the summer beach season.

Officers have been taking them out on an intermittent basis for the past month, and Miguez said he opted for a Segway when he was assigned to foot patrol across from City Hall for two hours on Thursday.

"I decided to take a Segway that day, and I observed a Mercedes-Benz coming out of the drive-through of Burger King, and it was being operated by a kid that to me looked underage, so I approached to get a better idea of what was going on," he said.

"I'm about 9 inches off the ground [on the Segway], and even from a bit further away I was able to notice that the back passenger was wearing latex gloves," the officer said. The driver was wearing construction-style gloves, and the passenger wore latex gloves, he added, apparently to avoid leaving fingerprints.

"It wasn't a summer day but it had to be 80 degrees that day and I asked them what the gloves were all about. And that's when they all ripped off their gloves and he floored it. I gave pursuit on the Segway," he said.

After the car crashed, Miguez said, he was able to catch the 13-year-old driver, who identified his two companions. Those two, also minors, were arrested later. All were charged with juvenile delinquency.

Lt. Bruce Meyer, the department's public information officer, said the Segways are a relatively new tool, and Long Beach, the first force on Long Island to use them, is finding new benefits all the time.

Using them on the boardwalk, for example, saves the wooden structure from the heavier weight of police sedans, Meyer said.

"Also, the fact that it's an unconventional element of patrol adds the element of surprise," Meyer said. "People aren't expecting it."