

New way to ski

Lean this way, that way, on Trikke, three-wheel bike

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Gildo Beleski, chief technical officer and designer for Trikke Tech, rides the Trikke Freedom on a Buellton street. This Trikke has an electric motor in its front tire and a lithium battery, seen just in front of his right ankle, but you can operate it with the power off.

Bill Morson/News-Press



Mr. Beleski, left, and John Simpson, Trikke Tech partners, stand in their assembly area in their Buellton plant.

Bill Morson/News-Press

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Gildo Beleski seemed to ski down a Buellton street. He leaned far to the right, then to the left, but never lost his balance.

He did it on three wheels.

The 50-year-old Buellton resident developed the Trikke - a special three-wheeled bike. Riders stand on it, placing each foot on a ski-like platform. Each has a rear wheel, and the platforms are connected at the front wheel.

You use your entire body to propel and turn the Trikke, which is sold at Ohana Fun Co., 5285 Carpinteria Ave., Carpinteria; Trikke Tech's corporate headquarters at 597 Avenue of the Flags, Suite 103, Buellton; and at www.trikke.com. Prices range from \$599 to \$5,000.

Crowdfunding is helping Mr. Beleski and John Simpson, the company's co-founders, produce their new Freedom Trikke, which comes with an electric motor in the front wheel and a rechargeable lithium battery. The Trikke goes 10 miles on a single charge, and the battery, which has an estimated lifespan of four to five years, plugs into any 110 outlet.

Trikke Tech exceeded its \$22,000 goal and raised \$29,000 through Indiegogo, Mr. Simpson, a 53-year-old Carpinteria resident, told the News-Press outside the company's Buellton plant. The crowdfunding, which



Mr. Beleski looks at the Trikke Defender, a special model for police.
Bill Morson/News-Press



Trikke Tech partner John Simpson takes a Trikke Freedom for a spin.
Bill Morson/News-Press

continues through Saturday at www.trekkiefreedom.com, features a \$599 special on the Freedom. Its regular price will be \$999.

You don't need electricity to propel a Trikke, although models such as the Freedom include the motor, which comes in handy for going uphill and for greater speed. On flat ground, the motor can move you at 15 mph, Mr. Simpson said. Downhill, you can travel 30 or more mph without the motor.

You can move a Trikke by leaning forward and using your arms, or you can rely on your legs and lower body. Riders can get the Trikke going by pushing with one foot off the ground a few times, like you would a scooter.

Talking outside the Buellton plant, Mr. Beleski, the company's chief technical officer and designer, said people ask him why there's no seat. That's because a Trikke is intended for your health. "Standing on it, you're working on your balance, working all your muscles."

Noted Mr. Simpson, "It's a phenomenal fitness machine because you're punching with your arms and you're twisting side by side. You're working your core. You're using the shoulders, your back, the chest, the abs, your quads. I'll keep my legs bent, and I'll just go until I can't squat any longer and my quads are screaming."

Mr. Beleski noted there are many ways to ride a Trikke. "It's a combination of upper body, lower body, the way you're standing; you can be leaning forward. It's very gentle and very low-impact, but it involves the whole body."

A Trikke is ideal for short trips around town and means not having to find a parking space, Mr. Simpson said. "I commute from Shepard Mesa to downtown Carpinteria. That's about five miles. That's a piece of cake, about 20 minutes or so (with the electric Trikke). We have this really wide bike path on Casitas Pass (Road), so I am just like skiing and carving as wide as I can." (He added he takes precautions around traffic.)

The News-Press tested the Trikke and found that as you lean to the side, the handlebar goes with you, but the three wheels stay firmly on the ground. Mr. Beleski credits his vehicles' frames for the stability.

The Trikke is also portable, and can be folded and put in the back of a car.

Mr. Simpson and Mr. Beleski sell special models, such as their latest, the Trikke Defender, to law enforcement across the U.S.

Mr. Simpson said the Santa Barbara Police Department bought a couple Trikkes in 2013.

Although bicycles remain more effective for pursuits, Trikkes make law enforcement more visible in crowds, said Sgt. Warren Holtke, 44, a tactical patrol force officer. "They elevate you. Suddenly they (police officers) look like they're 7 feet tall."

Before Trikkes, Mr. Beleski got experience in the car industry.

The Curitiba, Brazil, native, studied physics during the 1980s at the city's Federal University of Paran , but didn't graduate. He spent the late 1980s and 1990s testing and developing car engines for a lab run by the Brazilian state of Paran and running his own automotive repair business.

"I tried, from 1989 to 1991, to make the business of Trikke in Brazil, but it was not the right place or the right time," Mr. Beleski said. But his automotive work led Mr. Beleski on trips to the U.S., where he saw people on roller blades and determined the American lifestyle lent itself to Trikkes.

He moved to Huntington Beach in 2000, the year he started Trikke Tech, and ran into Mr. Simpson, a San Francisco native then living in Venice, outside a Santa Monica sushi restaurant.

"I saw these guys on three-wheel vehicles," Mr. Simpson recalled, referring to Mr. Beleski and one of his friends.

"I had never seen anything like that," said Mr. Simpson, who had overseen design and sales of the game Pogs and sold miniature skateboards and razor scooters to retailers and distributors. "Gildo starting flying down the sidewalk, and I was like, 'Hey you! What is that? Come here!' I bought one from him. We started talking, and the rest is history."

Mr. Simpson invested in Trikke Tech in 2001 and joined Mr. Beleski as a partner the following year. They moved their business in 2005 from Venice to Buellton which allowed Mr. Simpson to be near his mother, Jane Roney.

Today they operate with a staff of 12 in Buellton and have pleased customers ranging from former President Jimmy Carter and Rosalynn Carter to Carpinteria resident Jacob Richmann, who formerly worked as an executive for Patti Pagliei, Mr. Simpson's wife and owner of Waxing Poetic, a Carpinteria jewelry business with stores in Summerland and Los Olivos.

Mr. Richmann bought the Pon-e, one of the electric models, in April 2014 and takes it shopping and to church.

"I always get stopped by people asking, "What is that? Is that electric? That's so cool," " Mr. Richmann, 34, told the News-Press.

Besides cutting down on gasoline and air pollution from a car, Mr. Richmann said he's having fun. "I feel like I'm a kid again!"

FYI

Trikke Tech sells its three-wheeled bikes, some with electric motors, at Ohana Fun Co., 5285 Carpinteria Ave., Carpinteria; Trikke Tech's corporate headquarters at 597 Avenue of the Flags, Suite 103; and www.trikke.com. To buy the Freedom Trikke at a special rate of \$599, go to www.trikkefreedom.com.

Regular prices range from \$599 to \$5,000.

Co-founder John Simpson is hosting test rides of the Trikkes from 8:30 to 9:30 a.m. today through Thursday in the parking lot in the 100 east block of Cabrillo Boulevard, next to Skater's Point Skate Park, in Santa Barbara.

For more information, call Trikke Tech at 693-0800.

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