

New transport options aim to be 'un-Segway'

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David Fisher of Inmotion SCV demonstrates the company's personal transporter at the Consumer Electronics Show on January 8, 2015 in Las Vegas

A host of newfangled wheeled devices unveiled this week offer innovative solutions to urban transport which could fulfill the failed ambitions of the Segway.

At the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, developers showed off

several self-balancing wheeled contraptions that aim to provide environmentally friendly short-distance transport, as well as a host of other gadgets: skateboards, roller skates and a variety of scooter-like vehicles.

California startup IO Hawk used the show to launch its "intelligent personal mobility device," a small platform with two wheels and self-balancing technology which can be easily learned "by everyone from a five-year-old to an 81-year-old with muscular dystrophy," said company president John Soibatian.

While the \$1,800 device could be viewed as a lightweight Segway—it weighs just 22 pounds (10 kilograms), Soibatian dismisses parallels to the Segway, which launched in 2002 and never lived up to hype of revolutionizing urban mobility.

"This is not a Segway," he said. "There are no handlebars. You don't look weird. You can pick this up and throw it in your car, take it to work, take it on the train."

The IO Hawk device can travel up to six miles (10 kilometers) per hour. With its balancing gyroscopes that stabilize it, almost anyone can learn to use it in just a few minutes, said Soibatian.

In a similar vein, Chinese-based firm Inmotion highlighted a \$2,500 personal transportation device that has sold in the thousands in China.

"It's set up for fun and for personal transportation," said spokesman David Fisher, who demonstrated the vehicle on the CES show floor.

"It travels up to nine miles per hour so you can really fly through parking lots and hallways."

Weighing in at 35 pounds, the Inmotion device can be used both indoors and outdoors and has a range of some 15 miles. It has handlebars reminiscent of the Segway, but they can be removed to carry the vehicle or place it in a car.



Ori Dadoosh, founder and CEO of Israeli startup Green Ride, with the company's folding electric scooter at the International CES on January 8, 2015 in Las Vegas

Another lightweight transporter, the Hovertrax by US startup Solowheel, is designed for indoor use in places like shopping malls and large workplaces.

The company also has a single-wheeled version for outdoor use which requires a bit more training.

"A lot of people are interested in green transportation," said spokeswoman Joalene Jolivette, who demonstrated the Hovertrax, saying

it is "easy to use. You just step on it and go."

The 'next Vespa'

From Israeli startup Green Ride, a two-wheeled scooter introduced at CES offers a different solution for those who are looking for a more conventional ride.

"We think this is the next Vespa," said founder and chief executive Ori Dadoosh.

"We appreciate the idea of the Segway, but there were a lot of reasons it didn't work. One was a lack of regulation," which meant it was banned in some cases on sidewalks, streets and public transportation systems, Dadoosh noted.

The Green Ride "personal electric vehicle" looks more like a classic scooter with a futuristic design, but weighs just 44 pounds and can be folded up and carried on a train or into an office.



Peter Treadway of California-based startup Acton demonstrates the company's M-Scooter, one of several alternative transportation devices shown at the Consumer Electronics Show on January 8, 2015 in Las Vegas

It is designed for maximum speeds of 15 miles per hour, in conformity with most European regulations for driving without a license. The company plans to launch in Europe later this year, and is looking at selling later in Australia and North America.

Connected skateboards, skates

Meanwhile French startup Rollkers showed its connected roller skates which can be slipped over shoes to propel users up to six miles per hour.

"They are designed not for a roller skating motion, but to reproduce the natural walking motion," said Rollkers inventor Paul Chavand. "The wheels accelerate this movement."

Also on display was the ZBoard, a weight-sensing electric skateboard with regenerative braking.

California startup Acton showed another set of roller skates called "rocket skates" as well as a three-wheeled scooter than can be folded up and carried.

"We got into this to solve the problem of the last mile," said Acton's Peter Treadway.

"A lot of people use their car because it's too far to get to the train station, we have a lot of gaps in public transportation."

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