

Riding Segway's hoverboard is like skiing on LA's streets

June 22 2016, by Ryan Nakashima



In this May 27, 2016, file photo, company representative Zach Servideo demonstrates Segway's new self-balancing scooter, the MiniPro, in downtown Los Angeles. Despite associations with fires and falls, the MiniPro comes across as a good way to make public transit more accessible if you aren't near a subway station or bus stop. (AP Photo/Reed Saxon, File)

A new self-balancing electric scooter from Segway grows on you. Like a comfortable pair of shoes, it takes you places, but on wheels.

Unlike a skateboard that can shoot out from under you, Segway's MiniPro—and all hoverboards for that matter—try to stay under your center of gravity. That makes them easier to ride than a skateboard, and because of its [electric motor](#), a lot less work.

In the couple weeks I had to play with it, I came to view the MiniPro less as a dangerous new toy and more like a bicycle. It's a way to make public transit more accessible if you aren't near a subway station or bus stop.

The catch is you need to navigate a maze of regulations . New York City, for instance, won't let you carry them on subways and buses at all, let alone ride them on the platform, because of their risk of fires.

Over the past year, hoverboards have become synonymous with danger. They've been blamed for embarrassing falls by the likes of Kendall Jenner and Mike Tyson and for at least 62 electrical fires in the U.S., as tallied by the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Amazon, Best Buy and other retailers dumped the products after videos of burning hoverboards went viral. Only recently have they reopened sales in light of new fire-safety tests.

Segway, maker of the eponymous upright scooter beloved by mall cops and airport security, is one of those brands that passed. That means it survived a battery of punishment including being submerged partially in water and dropped three feet onto concrete without bursting into flames. Orders for the \$1,000 MiniPro are already being taken, with shipments expected to begin next Wednesday.

What wasn't tested, though, was how safe they are to balance on. On that front, you're on your own.

For people who have skateboarded, skied or gone snowboarding, the MiniPro is a piece of cake. At first it can make your feet sore as you

find your balance, but for me it took only about a half hour to relax. Friends who tried it wobbled, and some reached for my hand. One took a minor spill, but got right back on and was quickly cruising—albeit slowly—through our office parking lot.

This two-wheeled electric vehicle zooms forward when you lean forward and slows down or rolls backward when you lean back. To turn, you push a steering stick between your legs left or right. You can spin in circles if you want.



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It does take some practice, but not a lot. At first, I couldn't imagine hitting the top speed of 10 miles per hour. Sidewalk cracks were terrifying.

But before long, moving became as easy as thinking about it. You keep your feet and knees together and swerve side to side. Just like carving around moguls on the ski slope, you can turn the corner on sidewalks. You even put pressure on the outside foot in a turn, just like putting your weight on your outside ski.

Sidewalk cracks and even tree roots quickly become minor obstacles. A little bending of the knees and a mental hop is all it takes to get over them smoothly. Going uphill and downhill is a breeze. Even on crowded sidewalks, I found I was able to get by without rolling over anyone's toes. You can stay on while waiting for traffic lights to turn, without contorting to find your balance like cyclists.



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MiniPro's range of about 14 miles on a single charge was more than enough for a couple afternoons of roaming around.

The biggest hurdle is figuring out where you can ride . In Los Angeles,

for example, state law requires you to be at least 16 years old, and you aren't allowed to ride inside buildings on the University of Southern California campus. Outdoors, though, no one seemed to mind. One campus security guard smiled and said "hi." I had no trouble elsewhere in downtown Los Angeles, as long as I was outdoors. Regulations aside, I found that security guards treat them much like skateboards.

But there's still uncertainty, and it's a \$1,000 gamble on whether you can use it for your commute.

There is one thing you can bank on. These things are head-turners. Riding one is like you've beamed to Earth from the future. People will smile at you and stare. That's half the fun.



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