



Ohio Magazine, September 2009

GLIDE & GO

Hop on a Segway for a fresh, fun way to discover a new Ohio destination
or rediscover your own hometown.

by Kate Harold

Until a few months ago, I had forgotten what it felt like when I first learned to ride a bike. After all, it's been some years since I shed my blue-and-white Schwinn of its training wheels. But it all came back to me recently when I mastered another sweet ride: a Segway Personal Transporter (PT).

That's right — a Segway. You know, those two-wheeled things you see police officers riding that make you think, “That looks fun!” Well, it is fun. And you, too, can capture that youthful feeling thanks to four Segway touring companies located throughout Ohio.

When it was introduced in 2001, the Segway was touted as “the world's first self-balancing human transporter.” Because it lifts riders about eight inches off the ground

and travels at speeds up to 12-and-a-half miles an hour, security and police departments soon saw the vehicle's value. They use Segways to scan crowds, cover distances quickly and be more visible to the public. Now, with guided Segway tours throughout the United States, even average Joes can become full-fledged "gliders."

A Quick Learn

Learning to ride a Segway is much easier than learning to peddle that Schwinn many years ago. Most Segway rookies start to feel comfortable within five to 10 minutes of stepping aboard. Each tour starts with a brief training session that teaches how a Segway works and how to ride it. Any worries are quickly eased as the Segway uses its five gyroscopes (wheels that can spin in any direction) to balance you automatically.

Then it's just a matter of leaning. A light amount of pressure on your feet or calves will move you forward or back. The more you lean, the faster you go. Within minutes, a childlike grin sets in as you begin cruising all on your own.

"It becomes intuitive after a short amount of time," says Dianne Wente, tour manager for Segway of Ohio-Cincinnati. "You don't even think about how to make it work; you just go." After all gliders have been trained and the tour guide assesses each one's comfort level, it's time to hit the road.

Happy Trails

Each tour features something a bit different, with Tomorrow's Transport in Cleveland offering the most variety. Here, you can try four different tours, with sites ranging from cityscapes to picturesque parks. City of Mentor tours give gliders a nice view of this

eastern suburb, with passes by city hall, the civic center and Veterans Park. The city of Cleveland tour features glides along the waterfront, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum and Quicken Loans Arena, among others. In the Cleveland Metroparks, the North Chagrin Reservation tour takes you through wooded areas and open fields, across boardwalks and tunnels, and by ponds, rivers and waterfalls. A second tour of North Chagrin offers additional time on the Segway and briefly leaves the park and heads into Mayfield Village.

Bob Considine of Tomorrow's Transport says Segways give gliders the feeling of being a part of their environment, more so than when touring by car or bus. "They're nice because they allow you to be out in the open air and get up close to sites," he says.

Hidden Gems

Another great part of these adventures is that gliders can cover more ground than on foot. Cincinnati's tour of historic Eden Park uncovers areas of the park that even long-time Cincinnatians may not know exist. In addition to popular spots such as Mirror Lake and Krohn Conservatory, this tour gives you a look at Presidential Grove, where a tree is planted for each U.S. president; Liberty Garden, which celebrates freedom and honors September 11 victims; and a Vietnam War memorial.

"A lot of people don't know how big Eden Park is," Wente says of the nearly 187-acre greenspace. "This is a good way to see the park you've always known in a new way." She peppers her tour with nuggets of information, including that the park's garbage cans are solar-powered, which means that they compact trash when it reaches a certain

level, allowing for a higher capacity and less pick-up. And if you're lucky, you might get a peek at an albino squirrel.

A Dose of History

David Weller's SegAway Tours in Columbus highlights no fewer than 50 sites and attractions. His route winds through downtown Columbus by the Statehouse, the Short North Arts District and the Arena District. Gliders also take in scenic views along the Scioto River and through Goodale Park.

Weller injects history and humor into his tours. He points out a sign for the long-gone Belmont Casket Company on the tour route. They produced what was once considered the "Cadillac of caskets," Weller explains, with two of its more famous customers being John F. Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe. Thanks to facts like these, Segway tours are ideal for locals and out-of-towners alike.

Nurtured by Nature

For a tour that will get you in touch with nature, try one of those offered by Firefly Hollow Enterprises in southeast Ohio's Little Hocking. Firefly's Segways manage nature and birding tours easily with their all-terrain tires. After a training session in a lovely daylily garden, the birding tour is tailored to your level of birding experience, with the chance to see a scarlet tanager, Kentucky warbler and even a cerulean warbler, a threatened species but one that can often be spotted in Firefly Hollow.

The company's nature tour offers glides through the same wooded trails and meadows, but with a focus on the area's history and vegetation. "It's a great place to get

your mind and spirit refreshed,” says owner/operator Lee Unterschultz. Little Hocking makes for a nice day trip from Columbus, Athens, Hocking Hills and Marietta.

Touring Tips

Since Segways are battery-powered, they are emissions-free. The vehicle’s maker, Segway Inc., says that the PT is 11 times more energy efficient than the average American car. A single battery charge can send a glider on a 24-mile journey. And Segways are almost noiseless, which Unterschultz really appreciates. “The fact that they are so quiet makes them ideal,” she says. “We can glide through the woods with minimal disturbance while being able to hear the sounds of nature around us.”

All of the touring companies have weight and age restrictions (the minimum age ranges from 14 to 18 years old). Helmets are required and provided. The number of gliders per tour varies — be sure to ask when making reservations. Most of the companies offer gift certificates and off-season or customized tours (think birthday celebrations or team-building activities). And definitely bring a camera.

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