



The Segway Scooter

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

A few months ago I was temporarily staying in Pasadena, California, about an hour from home, where I'd been dropped off without a car. I didn't know how I'd manage. My hotel was just a 20-minute walk from the office, but living in Southern California as I do, I'm just not used to walking and prefer to drive. The only sensible thing to do, I decided, was to purchase something to get around in. Perhaps a moped.

When I was younger I'd always had mopeds. Drove them from the age of 12. Had often been injured on them too. Once when I was around 14, I was driving my moped down the street at 30 miles an hour and became captivated by a group of girls my age on their bikes – to the point that I crashed my scooter right into the back of a parked car.

The car I hit was literally right in front of a hospital emergency room.

I went flying over the trunk of the car and rolled straight into the driveway to the front door of the Cottage Hospital emergency room. As I lay there I could faintly hear the girls laughing in the distance.

"That was the funniest thing I'd ever seen!" one of those girls told me years later.

As I lay there bleeding, unable to move one of my arms, a team of doctors and nurses came running out; they put my neck in a brace, lifted me onto the stretcher, and wheeled me into the hospital.

I was X-rayed for the next few hours, and when it was clear I'd not broken anything, I was discharged with a few stitches and an arm sling (which I promptly discarded).

I limped down the street toward the home of one of my friends – whom I ran into on the way. He'd heard about the accident and, without stopping to visit me in the emergency room, had picked up my moped (which by some miracle was still running), set a ramp up in the middle of a small street, and was taking turns with some friends jumping it into the air. So much for one moped adventure.

Another time, again going 30 miles per hour, I crashed my moped into a brick wall during school lunch hour. This time I had a passenger. Since it happened during school and I was injured, my mother had to come pick me up. My passenger, who'd hit his head in the collision, was hurt so badly he was out for a week. I'll never forget the school nurse shining a small flashlight in his eye.

"His pupil is not moving right!" she reported to his mother over the phone. "He seems very disoriented. GREG!! DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOU ARE!!? IT'S YOUR MOTHER. SHE'S COMING TO PICK YOU UP, OK?"

"How does someone hit a brick wall?" my distraught mother asked me.

"I don't know," I said. I honestly did not. Despite having a helmet on, I think I might have blacked out.

"You better hope Greg's parents don't sue us!" she said.

Fortunately, they didn't. But I never quite got over my love for mopeds and scooters.

So. Fast-forward to Pasadena and my being without wheels. I decided I'd buy a motor scooter to get around in. But as I scanned Craigslist and something grabbed my attention: a Segway scooter.

Now, my wife loves making fun of people riding Segways, which she considers among the more amusing transportation devices ever invented. And I have to admit I agree with her. People riding Segways, wearing their little helmets, look positively ridiculous – especially when they take themselves seriously. There's nothing cool whatsoever about Segways.

But ... I'd been in the middle of a redecoration project and had just sold a couch for \$3,500, and the cash was burning a hole in my pocket. I felt like a drug dealer, walking around with all this money.

I saw a Segway advertised for \$5,500.

I called the owner.

"I really don't want one," I explained to him. "In fact, I think these things are ridiculous. But I'll pay you \$3,500 for it if you can deliver it in the next two hours."

"I live in Palm Springs, 90 miles away!" the man replied. "It's only six months old and I paid \$6,500 for it."

Advancing in years, the seller had multiple health problems and could not walk properly, so he'd bought the Segway to get around the numerous buildings of the veterans hospital during his weekly treatments.

"I only have \$3,500," I told him. "But you need to be here in no more than three hours."

The man showed up in a handicap van accompanied by another veteran. Both men were heavysset and wore blue hats with insignias of the ship they'd served on in World War II. They both smoked and no longer had any hair. The Segway was in the back.

It was a pretty good-looking toy. I was impressed with its size and heft. We managed to get it out of the car pretty quickly.

"Have you ever ridden one of these before?" the man asked me.

"How hard can it be?" I said. I stepped on the Segway and immediately started shaking back and forth with it. I had no idea how to control it. Both men lunged toward me and caught me before I fell on my face.

Then they coached me on riding it around the hotel parking lot.

Training completed, I rode the Segway back inside the Huntington Hotel to my room. The Huntington is hands-down the classiest hotel in Pasadena, really beautiful in all respects. Once a Ritz Carlton, it was purchased recently by the Langham

Hotel—a brand even more upscale than the Ritz.

To my astonishment, no one batted an eye as I whipped through the lobby and corridors on my new device. It was as if I wasn't even there. 12.5 miles an hour down the hallways? No problem! Riding straight into the dining room? Ditto. In fact, for the entire week I was in the hotel, the only reaction I got was from a few tipsy women in their 60s leaving the bar at 11:00 pm on a Friday night.

"Give us a ride!" one shouted.

After initially riding my Segway through the hotel and getting zero attention, I rode across the street and started down the sidewalk in that posh neighborhood. The Segway seemed to be electronically limited to go only 12.5 miles per hour, but I was getting used to it.

As I gained more confidence, I began zig-zagging from the sidewalk to the grass alongside it, and this time it caught people's attention -- probably because I looked like a clown, riding around like that. Comments ensued, most vocally from kids.

"LOSER!" one of them shouted at me. (Something I still hear to this day.)

At at some point the Segway got completely away from me. I crashed and fell directly on my right ass cheek. Hit the ground so hard I badly scraped up my entire arm as well.

To my astonishment, the Segway came down to the ground with me and then, as if driven by some independent force, set itself upright and *continued traveling on its own* until it crashed head on into a tree.

I lay there for at least five minutes, trying to pull myself together. I'd hit the ground hard, and the wind had been knocked out of me.

No one seemed interested in helping me. Cars slowed down and drove by—I even remember a family pressed to the window of a giant Mercedes sedan, all staring down at me.

I'd crashed in front of a very large and elegant house. A man in yellow shorts and a white shirt across the street was watering his lawn. He simply kept on watering, observing me with mild curiosity. My arm was covered in blood.

(That's another thing about Segway accidents: No one seems to care. A few days later, riding down the sidewalk, a car appeared out of nowhere, and as I pulled back to avoid hitting it, the Segway and I crashed and skidded to a few feet from it. This time I landed on my hands, which were bleeding profusely. As I got to my knees and held them out in what must have seemed some religious gesture, the driver, a serious-looking bearded man in his 50s, merely put on his turn signal, sat there for 20 seconds or so, and then drove away.)

This first accident, though, when I fell on my ass, was more serious. Back at the hotel I surveyed the damage: One rear cheek was completely red and scrapped up, the bruising so severe and the flesh so swollen that by the next day I could not even put on pants.

For the next few days I had to sleep on my stomach.

And for the following two weeks I was obligated to wear shorts. Weeks later, I still had a bulge the size of a baseball. It was not pretty. But I was determined to stick with my new vehicle.

A month later, I actually fell in love with my Segway. Back at home on the other side of town, I started riding it to my office in Malibu. The first day I rode it to work I took it into the parking garage and then rode in it up the elevator. (A Segway can be ridden quite easily in elevators once you get the hang of it.) As I exited the elevator I tried riding it straight into my office. Unfortunately, the wheel got stuck in the door jam and I went flying right into Reception ... without the Segway. At least there the staff came running to my rescue.

Thankfully, I was not injured – but the Segway must have considerably undermined the seriousness with which people took me in the office.

Still, I was committed to the Segway experience. But the model I'd purchased was intended for merely getting around town -- the same model people like George Bush (and many other celebs) have wiped out on (videos of which can be found all over the internet). Now I wanted the top-of-the-line Segway—the one that's also suitable for off-roading.

I put my used Segway on ebay. The day before the auction ended, a producer called me who was working on a comic roast with Charlie Sheen.

"I'll give you \$4,000 for it," he said.

Since I had paid only \$3,500, that sounded like a pretty good deal.

But because it was less than 24 hours before the auction ended, ebay wouldn't let me end the auction.

I sold it to him anyway. When he came to pick it up, I asked him if I could meet Charlie Sheen and come watch the show. He ignored me. I asked him again. He ignored me again.

(People connected with Hollywood can really be something. I recently moved right across the street from Dick Van Dyke. "Hi, we're your new neighbors!" my wife told him a few days after we moved in. He was getting in his car. "Yes, I know," he replied – and then he simply drove away, as we looked on in astonishment. He may be famous, but we're his neighbors. I mean ... seriously?)

When the producer left with my Segway, there were still a few hours left in the auction. To my massive disappointment, the auction went all the way up to \$5,500. I couldn't believe it. I hated to disappoint that buyer and shortchange myself, but that's the way it turned out. Ebay had not allowed me to end the bidding.

And I wound up buying the off-road Segway -- the same model the company's owner drove off a cliff (I'm not kidding). Here's the story:

Millionaire Segway tycoon dies in cliff plunge on one of his own scooters

The multi-millionaire owner of the company that makes Segway motorised scooters has died in a freak accident while riding one of his vehicles.

Jimi Heselden, 62, was found dead in a river after plunging 80 feet over a limestone cliff near his home.

But I was not the least bit deterred. I took my scooter off-roading on one of the many trails near my house.

I found one near a river.

Within five minutes, I'd rolled my Segway at least 20 feet down a large ravine, and it had pinned me.

The accident happened in a kind of slow motion. First, I fell and rolled down the ravine. Then, a few seconds later, the Segway DROVE ITSELF down the ravine until it hit me and pinned me. The Segway likes to make little video-game-type beeps, and I remember it making one when it hit me.

I was in a real rut. This time I injured my ankle. It took me at least an hour to drag the Segway up the ravine. I must have looked like one sorry son of a bitch, swearing every step of the way. Each time I'd push the Segway up it would come rolling down again.

Still, I'm committed. I enjoy my Segway. I ride it around Malibu, and people I don't know honk and wave at me. I guess I'm known as the Segway guy. I have yet to see anyone else riding one around Malibu. Friends and acquaintances come over to my house to try it out.

It's a lot of fun; I save on gas and help the environment. Most men my age living near me take themselves very seriously in their Ferraris; me, I have a Segway and I'm proud of it. I've even accessorized it with a special kickstand and a bag at the front. I walk my dog with it to tire him out. My four-year-old daughter and I take it to go get ice cream and to the movies.

Something I've learned is that you have to do what you want. You can't allow others to make rules for you. You can't trap yourself into doing what you think is cool. That thinking is for teenagers.

Before the Segway was released, it was touted by the company founders as something that would change civilization, like the telephone, radio, or car. Cities would be opened up and the world would change. But that never happened.

Maybe that's because of its image. There's nothing cool about the Segway. In contrast, cyclists, for example, look cool and athletic. (They're also not limited to going 12.5 miles an hour.) But the Segway's image suffers badly.

The Segway is a remarkable invention, something everyone should be using. I get to work for a few cents per day. It's fun to ride and goes fast enough. I can take it on all sorts of paths I can't get a car on. It's an immensely cool piece of machinery.

I'll take the Segway to work for the next 10 years or so. During that time I'll experience fresh air, put fewer miles on my car, and save tens of thousands of dollars.

What the Segway represents is a hidden opportunity, something that's been judged uncool. But some of life's greatest opportunities often come from the people, places, and things that are not widely adopted or well thought of. If something doesn't look promising to the general public, odds are a hidden opportunity may be waiting there.

The greatest opportunity generally lies where others do not see opportunity.

- If a company is poorly thought of because of some scandal—opportunity may be waiting there.
- If a certain type of job is thought less of because most people don't want to do it—opportunity may be waiting there.
- If a certain city is thought to be a poor place to work, for any number of reasons—opportunity may be waiting there.

Although I don't recommend being reckless if you purchase a Segway, I do urge you not to fear or avoid innovations that others don't necessarily go for. You can often find greatest opportunities when you're open to people, places, and things that other people have been avoiding for no good reason.

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