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Mountain bikes go to war

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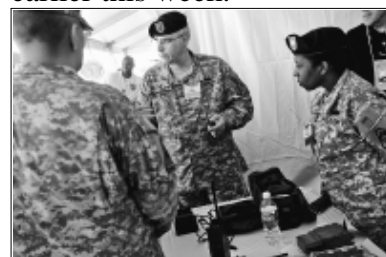
Mountain bikes are everywhere, even in combat zones.



Montague USA's David Widing looks over models of his firm's mountain bikes at Stafford Regional Airport.



Thousands of visitors and vendors mingled at the Force Protection Equipment Demonstration that was held at Stafford Regional Airport earlier this week.



Brig. Gen. Jess A. Scarbrough talks with other Army officers and vendors at the Stafford

Regional Airport show.

That's right, Montague USA provides "tactical military" versions of the ubiquitous cycles to branches of the U.S. military.

The bikes were among hundreds of exhibits being ogled by thousands of visitors at the Force Protection Equipment Demonstration exhibit at Stafford Regional Airport. The annual three-day show, where defense and security contractors show off their latest gadgets for fighting terrorism, ended yesterday.

Montague salesman David Widing demonstrated the company's \$800 fatigue-green Paratrooper bike to a small crowd gathered around his booth.

"It folds quickly. You can parachute with them. It has a quick-release front wheel. It's incredibly strong," Widing said, noting that troops get around with it in the international area (Green Zone) in Baghdad. "Medics use it, and it's used for reconnaissance," he said.

The company has three models it sells to the military, but they're also available to anyone else.

"We're finding that there's a lot of commuters who drive part way, then pull one out and ride the rest of the way," Widing said.

For the more security minded, there was a \$120,000 beefed-up, armored Chevy Suburban, made by Inkas Armored. Options not available on a factory model: three-eighths-inch thick bullet-resistant glass, steel blast plate underneath, upgraded motor, suspension, brakes and tires.

"It's used by the government, military, United Nations, NATO, celebrities, VIPs," said Inkas representative Philip Daskal.

If the Suburban wasn't enough, there was the sleek, fortress-like Toyota Land Cruiser, for a hefty \$130,000.

From the outside, there's no hint about what's inside and underneath.

"The whole idea is to make it look like a street model," Daskal said.

Eric Chukwu was among attendees admiring the Suburban. But he was at the show to check out the latest in non-lethal weapons used by security companies and police, the military and government agencies.

"I'm looking to see what they have and how the organization I represent could benefit," he said.

One of the more popular displays was the Acme Gadget Division's MO-ASS, or Mother of All Shooting Systems. The company specializes in computer-controlled weapons, turrets and sensors.

Yash Sinha, with Infrastructure Defense Technologies, showed off the Ripsaw MS1. The robotic treaded vehicle, resembling a tank, with a machine gun mounted on its top and claymore mines on its flanks, is controlled by a manned vehicle.

Sinha said it would protect convoys by checking out suspected improvised explosive devices ahead, guard checkpoints and patrol a perimeter, among other missions.

"It can operate in a 6-mile radius, 24/7," Sinha said. Software is still being developed for the prototype. The system was featured in "Popular Science."

There was some brass in attendance. At one booth, Brig. Gen. Jess A. Scarbrough talked with vendors. Scarbrough is assistant deputy for acquisition and systems management in the office of the assistant secretary

of the Army.

This is the second year the exposition has been in Stafford County. There were about 600 vendors.

"It's an important economic development opportunity," said county spokeswoman Cathy Riddle. The show generated about \$12 million for the county last year.

Riddle said another benefit for Stafford is getting the word out about its business potential.

The county's economic development office had a booth at the entrance.

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