

The E-Bike Invasion

Each of us who participate in organized bicycle clubs and club rides need to realize the e-bike invasion has begun. They are definitely moving mainstream.

E-bikes have made dramatic advances in technology as well as in acceptance by mainstream cycling enthusiasts. The International Mountain Biking Association has reversed their anti-e-bike position and is supporting the use of e-bikes on certain trails. Sales of e-bikes in the United States have witnessed a significant increase year to year. It is projected nearly 400,000 will be sold in the United States this year more double last year's sales. They remain a small 2.5% segment of the 16 million bicycles sold each year in the United States.

They have become attractive across the spectrum from the casual cyclist to the more serious. Generally they are pedal assisted having a handlebar mounted display allowing the rider to select a level of the electronic aid from zero to full power when climbing hills or when dealing with challenging terrain. They are being purchased by novices, committed commuters and serious group riders as well. They are particularly attractive to someone who feels they can no longer keep up with their ride group and want a little boost on a hill or if they become fatigued on an unexpectedly difficult ride.

E-bikes have not been addressed by the laws in most states, including Florida. The shared use non-motorized (SUN) trails throughout Florida will have to address how they approach e-bikes since they are specifically limited to non-motorized bicycles. Bicycle clubs may find it necessary to decide how their use may affect club rides and events. The proposed use of the bikes on trails around the country has sparked a significant debate both pro and con.

Generally, e-bikes are considered to be pedal bikes with a motor assist. Most e-bike motors produce no more than 750 Watts. Most have a motor assist dial which allows them to be ridden entirely without electronic assistance or with full assistance which typically tops out at 20 mph. No one would consider buying one to use as a road bike in the pedal only mode since these bikes weigh two or three times that of a carbon frame bike. We can expect their weight and capability to improve dramatically as the technology is refined.

Like most products, e-bikes are manufactured by mainstream companies like Specialized and Giant who produce bikes which operate pretty uniformly across their market line. But there are a lot of small companies making e-bikes which don't limit the rider to 20 mph. Some are capable of 28 mph or more and some do not require any pedal assist at all. There will invariably be the inventive home operator who devises a way to add an electric motor to a bicycle capable of producing even greater speeds thus exposing those around them to greater danger.

Jim Dodson is an experienced bike accident lawyer, cyclist and bicycle safety advocate who has been representing accident victims for over twenty-five years. He represents injury victims throughout Florida. He is the author of the Florida Bicycle Accident Handbook, relied upon by hundreds of cyclists across the state. If you have a question about a cycling accident, contact Jim at www.jimdodsonlaw.com. There is never any charge to discuss your case.