

## **What E-Bike Should I Buy?**

Like many of you, I have been fascinated by the proliferation of e-bikes. They come in endless varieties and for endless purposes, including exercise (as a road bike, gravel or mountain bike), commuting, and errands or just for fun (that's for me). But deciding on the ONE is really a challenge.

Here are some choices you have to make when narrowing your options. First, make sure it is a "bicycle" by law, which means pedal assist to 20 mph, throttle only to 20 mph, or pedal assist to 28 mph. Anything faster is not a bicycle and may not be covered by your homeowner's or auto policy (a big deal when you need the UM from your policy after a crash).

Second, what is your budget? You can go very inexpensive in the range of \$1000 or less. This typically means imported, likely from China, but there are some exceptions to be found. The cheap imports are nearly impossible to repair. Being unable to obtain an important part may render your bike useless. They are still fun while it lasts.

When you move away from the low end, the standard used to be the better quality bikes were generally in a range above \$2000 or so. That line has been blurred, notably by brands like Rad Power Bikes which *Bicycling Magazine* and Micah Toll at *Electrek* reviewed quite favorably. (BTW, *Electrek* has a ton of informative e-bike reviews in all price ranges and is a great place to start your search). Rad Power Bikes are in the \$1500 range and above. There are countless others. These typically have adequate components but nothing on the high end.

Quality definitely increases with price and you begin to have more choices to make. Motors are either hub drive (in the rear or front wheel) or mid drive (center crank). They both have advantages and disadvantages. Hub drives have been around and are less expensive. They can affect weight distribution. Some consider mid drives superior. A bike shop owner told me recently they would never try to change a flat on an inexpensive hub drive for fear they might inadvertently damage the power connection and render the bike useless if it could not be repaired.

Generally, above about \$3000 quality really begins to show up. Better bikes by the major brands start here at your local bike shop. You can find real quality at

about \$4000 and up, like mid drive, better motors and batteries with longer range, belt drive rather than chain drive, hydraulic disk brakes (much less maintenance) and better built in computers and lights. Most of these are still aluminum frames, carbon frames go on up in price.

If you order a bike make sure you know how much assembly will be required. Some require quite a bit, which can be very intimidating to many people, others just require adding pedals. Electrek reviewed a \$4000 Priority Embark e-bike that included amazing components and a “white glove” delivery with final assembly at your home. Bike shops, of course, provide this as part of their service along with being local to you along with their reputation of reliability.

To me, it is very similar to buying a car, at some point the increased quality is just not worth the increased price. The sweet spot is up to you. So decide what you must have and search in that range.

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