



EASY E-BIKE RIDER

E-BIKES CAN BE FUN AND USEFUL TO RIDE, AND CORVALLIS FOUND A WAY TO HELP LOW-INCOME PEOPLE BUY THEM *By Henry Houston*

It's one of those rare sunny spring Oregon days as I'm cruising downtown Eugene on an e-bike from Electric Avenue Sports. The sun is shining bright, and there isn't a cloud in the sky. I'm weaving through the traffic, moving from bike lane to vehicle lanes. I must have a huge smile on my face as I'm riding because someone shouts from a car, "Hey, nice bike."

Some e-bikes have a motor that kicks in to assist with pedaling and others have one as an acceleration through a throttle, similar to a motorcycle. Riding an e-bike with a throttle, that acceleration comes in handy as I go from being at a standstill at a red light to accelerating to flow with car traffic. There isn't that awkward sense that the car behind you is mad that you have to start pedaling.

E-bikes are one way to cut down on greenhouse gas emissions. There is an environmental impact from mining for the lithium for the batteries, but in an October 2020 article in the peer reviewed journal *Transportation Research Part D: Transport and Environment*, the authors found that carbon emissions could be reduced by 12 percent if just 15 percent of transit miles were traveled by e-bike instead of car.

As e-bikes increase in popularity, more styles have hit the market, which Electric Avenue Sports has seen as its niche: to offer e-bikes that match someone's personality.

But the price of an e-bike is a barrier for many.

Electric Avenue Sports — and other bike shops — have credit options, but if you live in Eugene, that can still be a barrier to getting an e-bike. Lower income residents of Benton County, who get their energy through Pacific Power, have an option for financial help: the Corvallis-Benton County Economic Development Office found a way to provide \$1,200 rebates.

It's a program that has become super popular with its residents because it's made e-bikes more accessible, says Kathryn Duvall, economic development specialist.

ELECTRIC FEEL

Walking into Electric Avenue Sports, the store's e-bike stock doesn't offer only run-of-the-mill bikes. While it does have more utilitarian bikes, its inventory ranges from models with the contours of a classic Indian motorcycle

to an e-bike with a sidecar to large bikes with off-road capabilities that could withstand a *Mad Max* apocalypse.

"We wanted to have a lifestyle design for our shop," Hawk Hekimoglu says. "This is something that you can see yourself on, and your personality just explodes out of you."

Hawk and his brother John Hekimoglu both grew up in Eugene, so they know about the large number of bike shops in town, many of which also sell e-bikes. But he says they opened Electric Avenue in August 2021 to sell e-bikes that you can't find in Eugene.

One side of the store, Hawk Hekimoglu says, are the more motorcycle-oriented e-bikes. "We're all just individuals running around like chickens with their heads cut off, but we just want to show off our individuality," he says. "We let your charisma and style flow out."

The other side of the store has the more practical e-bikes, he says. When a customer comes in, Hekimoglu says he and his brother guide the customer to the side of the store that fits their personality. "Whether you're 15 years old or 65 years old, you see this stuff and you just have your own personal feelings to it," he says.

There is a 20 mph cap for e-bikes in bike lanes and multi-use pathways. But the store carries the Onyx brand, which he says, goes up to 60 mph and comes with a certification of origin to be registered as a moped with the DMV, and can then be used as a vehicle on public roads.

The number of miles that you can get on a fully charged e-bike battery vary. The e-bike moped that can go 60 mph has a range of 20 miles without pedaling and takes about seven to eight hours to charge. A folding e-bike, a more practical commuter option, can travel 50 miles and needs around four to six hours to fully charge.

The store has community rides, more so when the weather is warm, Hekimoglu says. The group ride invites anyone with a bike — electric motor or not — as well as e-scooters and one-wheel hoverboards. The rides usually go along the riverfront pathways or are pub crawls, Hekimoglu says.

With prices ranging from the low \$1,000s to nearly \$5,000, e-bikes are more expensive than most bicycles because of the additional lithium battery powered motor and sophistication involved.

Like most bicycle shops, Electric Avenue Sports has credit options and even lets people come by the shop to make payments at the store and then ride off with the e-bike. But Hekimoglu says the cost comes with an investment that can improve someone's lifestyle. "When you invest in something that has a super positive impact, it affects you in more than one way. It affects you in other aspects of your life, as well," he says.

AN ELECTRIC OPTION

Buying an e-bike as a transportation option is limiting for many households, so the Corvallis-Benton Economic Development Office started its program to make it more accessible for those who can't afford the sticker price.

In 2020, the economic development office applied for a grant from utility company Pacific Power that funded electric transit options, Duvall says. The development office pitched an e-bike instant rebate program for low-income households with the goal of having 40 to 60 new e-bikes on Corvallis's streets.

The rebate checked a few boxes, Duvall says. The office works with the Corvallis Climate Action Advisory board, so it would reduce greenhouse gas emissions. An e-bike is an alternative to the high costs of car owner-



HAWK HEKIMOGLU