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## Wheels

The Nuts and Bolts of Whatever Moves You



January 19, 2010, 11:05 am

# For Electric Bikes, Three Makes a Trend

By [DANIEL MCDERMON](#)

It's a cliché in certain corners of the news media that a reporter needs to note three examples to report a story about a trend. The rule of three is often cited more in derision than admiration, but it seems to hold a certain amount of water. (For example, [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#). See how that works?)

So now it's official: electric bicycles are a trend. Or, to be more exact, articles about electric bicycles are. The Times and The Wall Street Journal have both featured articles on the subject this week. Brad Stone, writing in the Ping column for the Sunday Business section of The Times, noted that Sanyo, an electronics giant, is selling a [\\$2,300 bike with an electric motor](#), the Enloop, suggesting that more companies may follow suit. The Journal's Shai Oster, in a front-page article on Tuesday, cites [growing turmoil over electric bikes in China](#).

Mr. Stone focused on a shift in the United States toward the use of bicycles as daily transportation, which, when combined with technical developments in batteries with extended range, has prompted several manufacturers to offer electric bicycles for sale. The Journal's article focuses on the unforeseen consequences in China, where the increasing use of e-bikes has led to a perceived increase in accidents. Bikes with electric motors attached are often capable of speeds up to 20 miles an hour, faster than many traditional cyclists ride.

Meanwhile, one magazine is sponsoring a contest to find the [best home-built electric bike](#), while [The Irish Times](#) also covered the Chinese market angle, and numerous blogs picked up on [Sanyo's](#)

[presentation at the Consumer Electronics Show](#) in Las Vegas. The rule of three is, it seems, well met.

These articles come a couple of months after an item published in City Room by J. David Goodman, looking at the [unclear legal status](#) of e-bikes in New York. Before that, Wheels reported on a [short test ride](#) of one such bike, the Ultra Motors A2B Metro. So it seems that the media really have this particular trend covered. Which means just one thing: watch out for more.

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[Eneloop](#), [Sanyo](#)

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[1.](#)  
Don  
Oregon

January 19th, 2010

6:26 pm

The plural of "anecdote" is not "data".

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[2.](#)

SG

Eagle WI USA

January 19th, 2010

6:27 pm

I've spent time working in Shenzhen, south China's busy industrial city, and I can attest to the ubiquity of electric bicycles - in the last two years, they have nearly completely replaced the noisier motorcycles and mopeds. Even their postal service uses them. A charging infrastructure is apparently not needed for the lighter power requirements of these bicycles, they are just plugged into normal outlets.

The speed and silence of these bicycles requires some adapting to - as a pedestrian I have nearly been hit stepping off a curb on several occasions, and have really had to talk myself back into "second grade - look both ways" vigilance where my ears have been unable to assist. It's a real consideration, especially in China, where (to put it mildly) drivers have more expectations that others will get out of their way.

Other countries adopting these may want to consider adding a "putt-putt" sound to them over a given speed.

I'd still consider owning one to see how it fits my commuting needs. Local Chinese ones can be had for ~ \$300 USD equivalent but then you are on your own for exporting, charging (typically 220V) and maintenance. Price varies also by battery capacity.

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[3.](#)

WhatThe...

SW, Va.

January 19th, 2010

6:49 pm

Not to date myself, but re: "The speed and silence of these bicycles requires some adapting to - as a pedestrian I have nearly been hit stepping off a curb on several occasions", they should revisit a 1950's fad of clipping a baseball or poker card to the wheel frame and let the wheel spokes make the card flapping/rattle sound. Or some other clever constant noise-making contraption whenever

the bike is in motion.

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4.

Pedego Electric Bikes

Irvine, CA

January 19th, 2010

7:36 pm

Electric bikes are indeed becoming popular. With over 20 million ebikes sold in 2009 worldwide, it is obvious that they are not a new item. Unfortunately, there were only around 30,000 electric bikes sold in the US last year. Why? Mostly lack of consumer awareness that they even exist. Thanks for helping expose them!

As a manufacturer of electric bikes, I can tell you that the current buyers of them are the baby boomer crowd who remember how much fun it was riding a bike as a kid but now just do not want to fight the hills and headwinds. They are not buying them for transportation (like Asia or Europe), not buying them for fitness and not buying them to be eco friendly. They buy them because they are having fun! After riding them for a little while, do they go do errands to the store, etc. on them? Absolutely because it is more fun going to the store on a bike. Are they getting exercise? You bet since almost everyone still pedals while riding. Are they being eco friendly? A lot more than driving their cars to the bank, post office, etc.

Electric bikes will continue to become more popular in the US because 75 million baby boomers are going to lead the way having fun being a kid again. Best Buy sees this happening and they are rolling out electric bicycles in their stores nationwide. When gas hits \$5 per gallon (not if but when), watch out for the electric bike market!

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5.

[Russ Finley](#)

Seattle

January 20th, 2010

5:06 pm

Funny how trends happen. The Eneloop has all the same features of the electric bikes sold in a shop close to where I live, but costs twice as much. Why has it garnered so much attention?

When you look at the pictures in the China articles you realize that most of them are of electric scooters or mopeds, not bicycles with electric motors attached to them. A loophole lets you call anything with two wheels, an electric motor and worthless pedals attached, an ebike.

And the death rates they cite are tiny when you realize that there are over a billion people in

China.

There are no international standards for electric bikes. You can build your own that will outperform the Sanyo version for half the price:

<http://biodiversivist.blogspot.com...>

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[NYCeWheels](#)

NYC

January 20th, 2010

10:39 pm

I think it helps to have big players like Sanyo in the mix to help us get the word out. Sanyo has an almost unlimited marketing budget which is needed to let the general public know about electric bikes. 99% of Americans do not even know those exist.

Yes the bike could be a bit cheaper but the extra margin pays for PR, marketing and consumer education. Struggling electric bike manufacturers are not able to do that and therefore usually fail.

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7.

Alexa

DC

January 22nd, 2010

1:20 am

<http://trueslant.com...>

Another interesting article about e-bikes in China

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