

Tips for Fun and Successful Electric Bicycle Use

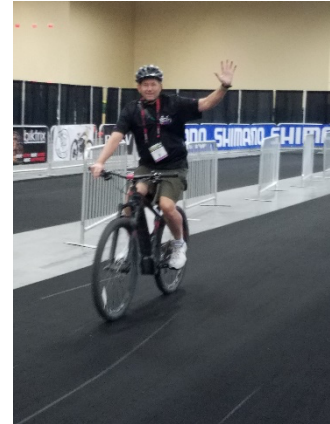
by Clint Sandusky

Electric bicycles (e-Bikes) are certainly fun and allow you to do many more things on a bicycle that you may not be normally able to do – especially persons limited by age, fitness, or disability (PeopleForBikes)! They are faster, heavier, and at times less nimble than “conventional” (or human-powered only) bicycles! The assisted power is a wonderful plus, but “with great speed, comes great responsibility!”

Here are some tips for fun and successful e-Bike use, but certainly not a complete list.

THE BASICS:

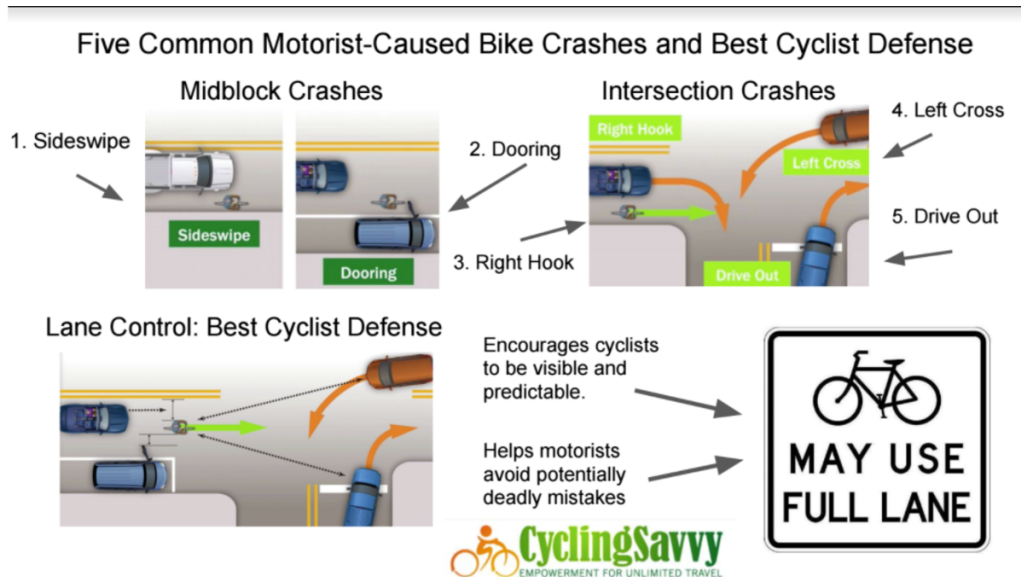
- Know the class of your e-Bike (Class 1, 2 or 3) and only ride legal e-Bikes
- Know the local, state, and federal laws for operating an e-Bike (*user, equipment, and access requirements*) whether on- or off-road
- Know how to operate your e-Bike, especially with its electric motor, rechargeable battery, different support modes, etc. **STAY WITHIN YOUR LIMITS!**
- Follow the Rules of the Road or off-road facility rules
- Read your owner's manual and speak with your local bike shop if you have any questions
- WEAR safety equipment (CPSC-certified bicycle helmet, eye protection, and cycling gloves); USE active and passive lighting, wear Hi-Viz/reflective apparel, and perhaps use of a horn and mirror
- Keep your e-Bike well maintained and clean



ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR RIDING YOUR FASTER E-BIKE:

1. **All bicyclists, especially e-Bike riders, must understand the traffic environment, from:**
 - Sight lines (yours, motorists, and other roadway users)
 - Dangerous “Door Zones” created by parked vehicles (**JUST AVOID THEM! – Stay at least 5 feet away!**)
 - Hazards and conflicts associated with higher-speed riding (they come up much faster and you will need greater bicycling-handling skills to avoid them; OR JUST TRY TO AVOID THEM IN THE FIRST PLACE.)
 - Blind spots, especially around trucks and buses – linked here is critical information for your safety [What cyclists need to know about trucks - CyclingSavvy](#).
 - Common motorist mistakes, especially by underestimating an e-Bike rider's speed. A motorist may mistake the higher speed of an e-Bike rider due to their more upright riding position, wearing of street clothes, and less exertion.

- It is very important for motorists to know why defensive driving bicyclists do what they do! Linked here is wonderful information and a video [Road Cycling: Why Do You Ride Like That? - CyclingSavvy](#).
- The dynamics of lane control (being relevant) and practicing “driver” behavior
- See illustration below which reinforces the above



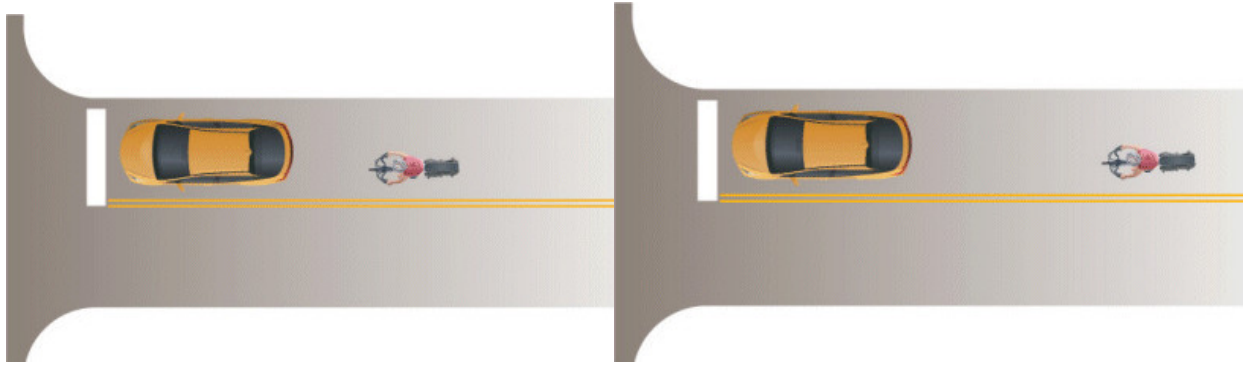
2. Mounting and Dismounting.

Getting on and off your e-Bike is an important skill, especially for less experienced and skilled and/or older persons (including with balance issues).

- It is especially important to keep the power/assistance to the motor (drive unit) OFF when mounting or dismounting your e-Bike. This is different from starting and stopping during a ride, normally done in a lower power mode (also known as an assist or support mode).

Turning the motor’s power/assistance to “OFF” eliminates “lurching,” which can occur with either throttle-assisted or pedal-assist-only e-Bikes. “Lurching” is described as an abrupt, unsteady, uncontrolled movement or series of movements; stagger (Oxford Dictionary). Unexpected lurching could cause you to lose your balance, fall over, and injure yourself.

- You can also avoid the consequences of an unattended “lurch” by allowing **more space** behind a stopped vehicle (as exemplified below) or when riding in a group of cyclists



Normal distance behind a car on a conventional bike (Illustrations courtesy of CyclingSavvy)

Normal distance behind a car on an e-Bike

- It is also important to “lock down your bike” BEFORE mounting or dismounting your e-Bike! Apply the left brake lever (front brake) before you mount or dismount, to prevent the bike from rolling out from under you. It is usually best to mount or dismount a bicycle from the left (non-drivetrain) side.
- A “low-step” or “step-through” framed e-Bike may be an excellent choice for less skilled and/or older riders, as they are easier to mount and dismount

3. Starting and Stopping.

As already discussed, e-Bikes are faster, heavier, and at times less nimble than “conventional” bicycles.

I love what Trek Bicycle Corporation has on its website, both in written and video forms [How to commute on an electric bike | Trek Bikes](#). Paraphrasing them:

- **Start slow:** *When getting a new e-Bike, take it nice and easy by starting on the low power mode for your first few rides or in general. Find a large, empty parking lot; or flat, smooth grassy area to get familiar with your new e-Bike.*
- **Brake sooner:** *with more power, speed, and a heavier bike means you'll need to start slowing down sooner than on a conventional bike.*
- **Brake lightly and evenly:** *e-Bikes now come with disc brakes, which means better braking in all conditions. When you're getting used to your new bike and brakes, be sure to always brake with a light hand and a gradual, even pull of both brake levers.*
- **Ride with extra caution:** *e-Bikes can look just like conventional bikes, so people might not expect you to be riding as fast as your e-Bike allows. This means you should be extra careful and pay greater attention to your surroundings when you ride.*
- **And follow the rules on the road:** *with all the gains of e-Bike use and access, we all would HATE to see those gains diminished and/or lost!*

4. Key Safety and Etiquette Issues.

- Always ride safely and legally, both on- and off-road
- Ride respectfully and cooperatively

- Don't flaunt your e-Bike's power, especially to other cyclists
- Use extra caution and **slow way down**, especially when other users are present on:
 - **Sidewalks** (if not restricted) – ride only at a pedestrian's walking speed/pace
 - **Shared-use paths and bikeways** (bike paths, bike lanes, and cycle tracks) – **if you want to ride faster, it's safer for everyone to do so in an appropriate travel lane**
 - **Multi-use trails** - it is essential for all bicyclists to YIELD to hikers and horseback riders! Yielding means slowing down, establishing communication, being prepared to stop if necessary, and passing safely.
- When passing a slower bicyclist or pedestrian be sure to:
 - Slow down to a safe speed
 - Do your normal "on your left" call-out and/or ring your bike bell in advance
 - Normally pass on the left
 - Make it a point, if safe and appropriate, while passing them to make a friendly and uplifting comment like, "what a great day for a ride!"
- Especially when riding off-road, if you come upon a horseback rider or other animal while riding an e-Bike, turn that motor's power/assistance to "OFF" if safe to do so! The "whining" noise of the electric motor may startle or spook a horse or animal.
- Additional trail etiquette for either "conventional" mountain bikes and/or eMTBs can be found from the International Mountain Bike Association (IMBA) at [Ride Vibes | IMBA](#) and Tread Lightly Organization [E-Bike - Tread Lightly](#).

5. The Importance of "Successful Bicycling" Education and Training.

Regardless of the make, model, and type of e-Bike you use, seeking out "successful bicycling" education and training is IMPORTANT! E-Bikes are heavier and afford even the average rider the ability to travel further and at faster speeds.

- For on-road cycling, it is important to learn how to interact safely, legally, defensively, cooperatively, and with less stress with all users of the road. A CyclingSavvy in-person and/or online course will do that for you! For more information on all CyclingSavvy's resources and courses, go to <https://cyclingsavvy.org>.
- For off-road riding, REI has various mountain biking classes at [Cycling Classes & Events | REI Classes & Events](#). For additional resources and classes, do a Google search.

Clint retired in 2016 after a 24-year career in law enforcement, both with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's and Riverside Community College District Police Departments. While with RCCD, he was a bike officer for 23 years and has been an active CA POST-certified Bike Patrol Instructor for 28 years.

Clint has taught, presented, authored, and consulted on e-Bike content and training to law enforcement and governmental officials, and the cycling community and industry both in California and nationally. He is a member of IPMBA's E-Bike Task Force and conducts e-Bike content at its annual conferences. In 2022, Clint was asked to participate in PeopleForBikes' E-Bike Safety Task Force. He runs errands, trains, instructs, patrols, and races on e-Bikes (e-MTBs). He can be reached at clint.sandusky@gmail.com.

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