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How to Safely e-bike in traffic

Whether you are using your e-bike for pleasure or for the pleasure of commuting and not being stuck in a dusty old car while doing so, you'll want to be aware of some simple rules for the road that can keep you from becoming a statistic. The rules for e-biking in traffic are similar to the ones for riding a standard bike and while not set in legal stone, will keep you alive and unharmed if followed.

The most simple safety tips should be the most obvious. Always wear a helmet. Always ride on the proper side of the road with traffic, not against it. Keep your tyres inflated to the base PSI. Use a mirror.

Some cities are set up for e-bikes (better and more available bike lanes, wider streets) but most aren't. Since most e-bikes are not road-legal vehicles, you'll want to choose a route that has bike lanes. If that route isn't available and your e-bike is street legal (proper turn signals and you can keep up with traffic) then be sure to own the lane as you head into traffic.

That means that in city centres, you'll generally be keeping up with and part of traffic, which is much safer than hugging the curb. In rural areas, hugging the curb is generally the way to go, as speeds are higher and it gives cars more room to safely pass.

Regardless of whether you can ride in the road or not, be sure your e-bike has proper lights, especially on the rear.

I always ride with my rear light on, day or night. This makes it easier for drivers to have a chance to see you and react a lot sooner, especially drivers who tend to drift into the bike lane.

Either riding your e-bike in the road or in the bike lanes, you are still interacting with cars on the road, so no matter the safety equipment, your brain is the most important piece of head gear keeping you safe. Not all drivers know how to react with bikes or e-bikes on the road and different cities have different laws

on who has the right to the road in accident situations. So your best bet on your e-bike is to avoid accidents all together.

There are a couple brain tips to keep you safe while riding an e-bike with traffic. The first is to be defensive rider. This means always keeping your head on a swivel and assuming that each driver will do the worst thing possible in any given situation. Awareness is key to surviving your e-bike ride, including anticipating every traffic scenario in front of you. If you think that car will attempt to pull into traffic, cutting you off in the bike lane, they probably will.

Watching out for drunk drivers is a lot easier if you are already under the impression that every driver is drunk.

When I'm out on the bike, I ride with the knowledge that every person on the road is a terrible driver and will be making the worst decision possible, or actively putting me in danger. This is especially true with angled parking on city streets, back-up cameras be damned, I've almost been backed into numerous times. And don't even get me started on roundabouts.

Which brings me to the most important piece of e-biking in traffic advice: always make eye contact with other drivers when crossing paths. Obviously this rule doesn't hold true with the regular flow of traffic, but if someone is trying to turn in front of you, pulling into traffic or making an oncoming turn, making eye contact tells you that they see you and your e-bike and you can act accordingly. Often I wave drivers on, just to make sure they don't make a dumb decision. Get them out of the way so you can continue on yours.

Riding an e-bike can have many health and commuting benefits, but it will always include riding with traffic.

Traffic doesn't always do what you want it to do, so remember to stay aware, e-bike with the proper safety gear and communicate with car drivers.

When it comes down to it, no matter who is right and who is wrong in a collision, you're on an e-bike and they are in a several thousand pound motor vehicle. You will lose every battle, so it's best to avoid the fight by being hyper-aware and attentive when e-biking in traffic.

Curtis Silver