E-Bikes vs. E-Motos: Why the Distinction Matters

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As electric two-wheelers become more common, it is important to distinguish e-bikes from e-motos. The terms are often used interchangeably, but these vehicles can differ significantly in speed, power, weight, safety risks, and legal requirements.

What's the difference?

Under New Hampshire law, an electric bicycle must have functional pedals and a motor rated at no more than 750 watts. An electric two-wheeler may not qualify as an e-bike if it:

- Does not have functional pedals.
- Has a motor rated at more than 750 watts.
- Can be propelled by its throttle at speeds exceeding 20 mph.

Class 3 e-bikes can legally provide pedal assistance up to 28 mph. E-moto is a term used to describe more powerful electric two-wheelers, although it is not currently a legally recognized vehicle category in New Hampshire.

E-motos can accelerate faster, reach higher speeds and require more distance to stop. Their greater weight and speed can increase the potential for serious injury in a crash and make them harder for other road users to anticipate.

Bicycle advocacy organizations, including Bike Walk Alliance of NH and PeopleForBikes, as well as The National Bicycle Dealers Association, use the term "e-moto" to distinguish these vehicles from e-bikes.

Why accurate reporting matters

E-motos are often easier and less expensive to purchase than motorcycles, including being accessible through online retailers. Buyers may not understand that these can be subject to different legal requirements. Depending on the e-moto and where it is operated,

a license and registration may be required, and the use of an e-moto on bike lanes and multi-use trails may be prohibited.

Crash statistics can be difficult to obtain because reporting systems do not consistently distinguish e-bikes from e-motos. Available data may therefore provide an incomplete picture of crashes involving these vehicles.

A request to news organizations

When reporting on a crash or other incident involving an electric two-wheeler, please identify whether the vehicle was an e-bike or an e-moto. Ask law enforcement or other sources to clarify. If the type cannot be confirmed, say so rather than labeling the vehicle an e-bike by default.

Accurate terminology helps the public better understand the risks and supports more informed conversations about safety.

For more information: PeopleForBikes: “The E-Bike Problem Is an E-Moto Problem”