

Older e-bike users still hit by throttle ban

Allowing throttle for fine control will enhance safety, especially for elderly riders, says bike expert

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Visiting the supermarket and mosque on foot or public transport is quite an ordeal for retiree Sheik Abdullah, 80, who has osteoarthritis in both knees.

To get around, he relied on an e-bike, or power-assisted bicycle (PAB), with a throttle.

A throttle is a start-up assistance feature on the handlebar of a motorised bike that allows users to move without pedalling. But since 2005, throttles have been banned, although it has been a common modification that people still make.

Due to safety concerns arising from illegally modified e-bikes, the Land Transport Authority (LTA) announced tighter regulations and heavier fines for those who flout the rules.

From Feb 1, electric bicycles here must meet similar guidelines as those in Europe, called the EN15194,

and not weigh more than 20kg. While the LTA adopted most of the European standards, it stood firm against the use of a start-up assistance feature to help riders to move at a maximum speed of 6kmh without pedalling.

It cited safety concerns, as such a feature could be illegally modified for the PAB to travel faster than 6kmh without pedalling.

Under the current rules, the motor power of a PAB can cut in only when the rider starts to pedal.

"Many times, I've tried to pedal and fallen, and almost run into people... if I use a throttle, it's easier for me to control (the bike)," Mr Abdullah told The Straits Times in Malay. Although there are no official details on the demographic of e-bike users, retailers say many of their purchasers are older people. Many of these individuals also tend to add a throttle to their e-bicycles.

The owner of A-Tech Bike Supply, Mr Chris Kuaah, said people aged 55 and above made up 20 to 30 per cent of his customers when he started the business around a decade ago but they comprise around half his customer base now.

As their legs are not strong, he



said, almost 80 per cent of them want a throttle.

Mr Ong Beng Teng, who runs Singapore Bike City in Ubi, said that since the tighter regulations were announced, a few users aged 40 and above have approached him to undo their modifications for a throttle.

"These users don't use the bike to race, they just use it for convenience," he said, adding that he is sourcing for e-bikes suited for the elderly that meet LTA's rules.

Retiree Lim Thiam Hock, 85, no longer rides his motorised bike after he stopped using the throttle. "I can't pedal," he said.

According to Mr Francis Chu,

co-founder of cycling group Love Cycling SG, nearly eight in 10 motorised bike users he sees in neighbourhoods such as Geylang, Aljunied and Paya Lebar are aged 40 and above.

But existing rules, he said, indirectly force elderly e-bike users to choose between risking their lives on the road and breaking the rules to ride their e-bikes on the pavement.

"Allowing a throttle for fine control up to walking speed will enhance usability and safety, especially for elderly users and pedestrians," he said.

Dr Stephanie Burrridge, 60, an adjunct lecturer at Singapore Manage-

ment University who has been using an e-bicycle for 12 years, said: "It encourages independence in older people and the cutting down of car use."

She finds her current bike without a throttle more difficult to control compared to one with a throttle as it lurches at full power as soon as she starts pedalling.

"I hope seniors who are still able-bodied can be allowed throttles on two-wheelers instead of being forced to choose four-wheeled mobility devices like a motorised wheelchair," she said.

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LTA bans the use of a throttle to help riders to move at a maximum speed of 6kmh without pedalling. It says such a start-up feature could be illegally modified for the PAB to travel faster than 6kmh without pedalling.
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