

GET FITTER ON AN E-BIKE

Riding an e-bike can help you go further and faster than ever, meaning you can ditch the car to run errands on your own steam – and improve your fitness levels to boot! ➔

WORDS: Joanna Ebsworth



Thinking about investing in an electric bike? You're not alone. According to recent data from the Bicycle Association, sales of e-bikes enjoyed a 67 per cent increase in the UK following the Coronavirus pandemic. And this significant uptake is showing no signs of slowing down: a 2021 research study by Mintel predicted that the UK e-bike market – currently worth £280 million in sales – is set to triple over the next three years. But just why are e-bikes booming?

'E-biking encapsulates many of our current priorities, and it does so in a way that is fun,' says Natalie Creswick, a cycling and triathlon coach, and an ambassador for bicycle company Specialized (specialized.com). 'It is a green transport option, it saves money when the cost of fuel is sky high, and it provides a great way to get fit. After being cooped up during the pandemic, it's also a brilliant way to explore, get out in nature and improve your wellbeing.'

Kat Thompson, a spokesperson for bicycle company, Raleigh (raleigh.co.uk), couldn't agree more: 'Cycling is such a fantastic way to travel, and compared to traditional bikes, e-bikes boost your pedal power, so riders can go further and faster. The added electrical assistance makes cycling more accessible, and more able to fit it into a daily routine, whether you're commuting, running errands, carrying heavier loads or trying to get fitter. Plus, e-bikes can help us take a step towards decarbonising our towns and cities – all without breaking a sweat if you don't want to!'

GOING THE DISTANCE

Aside from being good for your body, mind and the planet, the soaring popularity of e-bikes is being helped by the wider variety of bikes now available to suit different riding styles and preferences, alongside advancements in e-bike technology. 'From city bikes and road bikes to mountain bikes and folding bikes,



there's literally an e-bike for your every need and whatever terrain you want to ride,' explains Creswick. 'And, with their cheaper, smaller and longer-lasting batteries, e-bikes are also lighter and go further. You still have to pedal an e-bike, but the electric boost means you can ride for longer over more challenging terrain, which opens up opportunities you might otherwise have thought impossible. It levels the playing field, because those with



GET E-FIT IN 5 WEEKS!

This five-week beginner plan from Specialized will help you build the fitness required for a 90-minute cycle

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Week 1	Spend 5 minutes getting to know your bike, including gears, power modes and brakes. Once comfortable, go for a 20-minute ride on a familiar and quiet route, such as your local park.	Rest	Opting for the same park or location as before, practise the route a couple more times. Try riding in different modes to get a feel for what the bike can do, and how much effort you can put in.	Rest	Your Choice	Rest	Ride for 30 mins and see what distance you achieve.
Week 2	Now that you're more comfortable, you can pick a slightly more challenging route that allows you to practise changing gears.	Rest	Let's add a challenge and build your fitness up. Pick a long hill and ride up it three times, turning around and descending between each repetition.	Rest	Your Choice	Rest	Ride for 45 mins and see what distance you achieve.
Week 3	On a route you feel comfortable riding, add an extra 10 minutes to your ride.	Rest	Weekly challenge: Choose a hilly route or aim for three repetitions of one long hill.	Rest	Your Choice	Rest	Ride for 60 mins and see what distance you achieve.
Week 4	On your favoured route, aim to ride as fast as is comfortable and safe. Allow your heart rate to rise and your breathing rate to increase so you can only talk in short sentences.	Rest	Weekly challenge: Tackle a hilly route or repetitions of a hill with a little more intensity. Aim to feel slightly out of breath when you reach the top.	Rest	Your Choice	Rest	Ride for 75 mins and see what distance you achieve.
Week 5	Choose a 30-minute route and aim to complete it using only eco-mode. Push a little bit harder so your breathing rate increases.	Rest	Weekly challenge: Ride for an hour on a hilly route or use hill repetitions to strengthen your climbing.	Rest	Let's get started on your first 30km. This is going to be tough, so remember to pace yourself and drink enough water.	Rest	Ride for 90 mins and see what distance you achieve.



////// E-BIKE

different fitness and experience levels can ride together and enjoy it. Equally, you can get fit without totally exhausting yourself if you don't want to.'

Sounds amazing, but are e-bikes really suitable for everyone? Absolutely, says Thompson, who cites an e-bike's ability to 'turn a good journey into a great one' as a key reason why people of all ages, fitness levels and riding styles can't get enough of them. 'E-bikes are a great way to break down barriers to cycling for those who are recovering from injury, looking to improve their fitness or wanting to start their cycling journey. Pedal as much or as little as you want, and the motor will assist you with the rest! The fact that you're not reliant solely on your own effort means you know you'll be able to get home with ease when you head out on your adventures.'

THE BODY BENEFITS

While e-bikes have been shown to provide fewer fat-burning benefits per mile than unpowered bikes (research published in the journal of *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise* estimates you can burn an average of 500 calories in 60 minutes on a regular bike, compared to 390 calories on an e-bike), studies have shown that e-bike users tend to end up with similar overall levels of physical activity because e-bike riders travel longer distances on average.

If you're looking to get fitter, or are new to cycling, Creswick says that riding an e-bike can encourage you to cycle more regularly and for longer, so you can



build up your fitness while building your self-confidence on the bike at the same time. But will an e-bike be a waste of money for already-fit cyclists? Absolutely not, says Thompson, who argues the common myth that e-bikes don't provide the rider with a workout

is simply not true because it's down to the rider to decide how much – or how little – assistance they use.

'You might already be fit, but your bucket-list dream of cycling from Lands' End to John O'Groats could feel unreachable,' says Thompson. 'However, an e-bike would make that dream a reality. And, if you're already active, riding an e-bike would mean you can enjoy all the physical and mental health benefits of cycling while leaving you plenty of energy for your other sports and pastimes.'



FIND THE RIGHT E-BIKE

With so many e-bikes to choose from, finding the right one for your needs can be a minefield. Here, Dave Ward, bicycle product manager for e-bike brand Momentum (momentum-biking.com), shares his buying tips.

1. Purchase in person

'Go and physically see a range of e-bikes at your local dealer rather than buying one online, especially if it's your first e-bike purchase or you're buying an e-bike after a long break from cycling. Sit on some e-bikes, get a feel for them and try them out if you can. An e-bike has everything a regular bike has, such as brakes, gears, wheels and tyres, plus a motor, battery and different levels of assistance, so there's a lot to take in. Learning how to use your e-bike from an instruction manual or online article can be tough, so there really is no substitute for going into a shop and being talked through how an e-bike works by an expert.'

2. Select your style

'Decide what style of bike you want. Do you want an e-bike purely for fitness, commuting through the city, tackling countryside terrain or one that does a bit of everything? Once you've decided on your needs, make sure you buy the right size bike for your height. If your bike is too small, you could be changing gears with your knees. If it's too tall (and, therefore, longer in length), you'll end up stretched out, which isn't safe. You need to be able to reach the pedals and brakes to stay in control of the bike, and your head needs to be in a good, comfortable position to see everything around you, including surrounding traffic.'

3. Check your charge

'The capacity of a battery is measured in watt hours (Wh). Typical e-bikes can range from 300 to 800 Wh, and that figure indicates the size of your fuel tank. More is more, so the higher the number, the longer your battery can go for – but the price goes up accordingly. A bigger battery will give you the confidence to know it will see you to the end of a long ride. That said, the great thing about e-bikes (compared to electric cars) is that you can still pedal home if you run out of power! Another thing to consider is the lifespan of the battery. Some might work for as little as 300 charges and need replacing sooner, while others can last for at least 1,000 charges.'

4. Get up to speed

'The Newton-metre (Nm) metric indicates the torque (or strength) of the motor. In the UK, that can range from as little as 30 Nm up to 85 Nm, and the higher the number, the stronger the motor will be for better acceleration and climbing ability. Motors can be found in three different places on e-bikes: the front hub; the rear hub; or centrally on the downtube. Hub-driven e-bikes are often cheaper and less bulky, but they're not as strong as e-bikes with central motors. Also, remember that every e-bike sold legally in the UK has the same power output (250 watts) so they're all restricted to 25km per hour – pricier e-bikes won't go faster than cheaper models.'

5 OF THE BEST E-BIKES



Raleigh Motus Tour Hub Gear Low Step e-bike

£2,599; raleigh.co.uk

WF tester Joanna Ebsworth says: 'Everything about this high-quality e-bike screams reliability and sturdiness. It comes fully-equipped with a mid-mounted Bosch Active Line motor (barely audible in use), a 400Wh battery, Shimano 7 speed hub gears and strong but smooth hydraulic disc brakes, as well as integrated front and rear lights that work from the main motor, front and rear mudguards, a luggage rack, chain guard and kick stand. The upright position, padded Selle Royal saddle and amazing suspension help to create a super-smooth and comfy ride, and you get up to 173km of assisted riding with one charge. The four levels of power assistance are accessed from a handy remote control next to your thumb, and the Bosch Intuvia Display bike computer reveals your distance, speed and battery capacity. The only downside is it weighs 28kg, so not the easiest bike to get through the house. But once I'm on it, commuting and days out are a dream.'



Momentum Vida E+

£2,899; momentum-biking.com/gb

Available in four colours with a choice of a mid-step or low-step frame, this e-bike has an upright riding position and luxe saddle for extra comfort. It also feels super-safe thanks to the wide, grippy tyres and reliable disc brakes that work in all conditions. One charge provides up to 170km of assistance that automatically adjusts to reflect the terrain, while the 60Nm motor will get up hills with ease.



Canyon Roadlite:ON 6

£2,699; canyon.com

This sporty hybrid e-bike provides 120km of assisted riding in one charge and lets you choose from three modes: Breeze (gentle and constant); River (progressive and dynamic); and Rocket (powerful burst). It's light enough (16.3kg) to carry up steps and onto public transport, and you can shave an additional 3.6kg in weight by removing the powerful motor and riding it like a regular bike.



Brompton Electric C Line Explore

from £2,995;

brompton.com

Weighing just 15.53kg, this compact, folding 'Explore' model is built to withstand longer touring trips outside of the city.

With six gears and a 300 Wh battery, you get

performance and portability over a range of 25-45 miles depending on how much Smart Pedal Assist tech you need. Available in a choice of four colours and three handlebar heights, it even has a USB port to charge your phone on the go.



Specialized Turbo Vado 4.0

£3,900; specializedconceptstore.com

WF tester Sarah Sellens says: 'This ride packs some serious pep! With three preset modes of assistance - Eco, Sport or Turbo - plus an unassisted mode (Off), you can easily switch from a little pace support to a super cruising speed. This isn't the bike to take racing, but it is perfect for comfy commuting and hauling heavy backpacks from the shops. With a solid upright position, it felt safe and sturdy - I was confident riding it from the first go. And alongside the front suspension, the factory standard tyres provide a noticeably smooth ride. I love that it comes with rear and front built-in lights, plus a pannier-ready rack.'