

Case for and against e-bikes in Dongguan (Against)

In ancient Dongguan, when might made right and laws were laughed at, savages roamed the land, hunting and gathering, robbing the weak with impunity. Their weapon of choice: motorcycles. Yes, this was before 2007, when Dongguan still had motorcycles and e-bikes.

It may be hard to picture for those who only know this land in its motorcycle-free form. As an oldtimer, I will use some of the horrors of the past to predict the future:

Robberies galore

Ride-by robberies used to be a fact of life in Dongguan. The victim, usually a woman with a purse, would be approached by a duo on a motorcycle at high speed. The rear passenger would grab the purse in motion, and persuade her to let go. Dragging the victim around until she lets go, it turns out, is quite persuasive.

Such robberies brought the entire community together. Everyone would hear the screams, pedestrians would gather, shop owners would rush out. Even the squatters would flick their cigarettes, get up and walk over, signifying an important event. They would surround the victim, several layers deep, and offer words of comfort, such as:

“Stupid woman, why did you bring a purse?”

“Tsk, tsk. That’ll teach you not to hold on”

Nobody would help. They’d squat next to her twitching body and smoke, but not get involved. Not for a woman audacious enough to **gasp* carry a purse!* For the kids on a motorcycle, hey, free purse. For the community, hey, free entertainment. Apparently victim shaming is such a good group-building activity and a beloved pastime, it is done universally.

Motorcycles and e-bikes don’t rob people; people rob people. Yet just like guns, they are enabling tools. See how that turned out in the US.

Traffic nuisance

Without traffic cameras, the relatively civil driving behavior quickly degenerates into a rage filled rampage, much like Bruce Banner turning into the Hulk. It is the threat of penalties that drives orderly behavior, not a law-abiding nature. E-bikes have no plates and no license requirements, making them practically exempt from traffic laws.

Think about how bad the traffic is now, and how it worsens with even a minor traffic accident. Imagine a gazillion bikes on steroids, each with a rider exercising his god given right to ride as he damn pleases. What would that do to the traffic? Well, I can’t think of a term polite enough to print.

The implications are clear: the cure is far worse than the disease. E-bikes will significantly worsen traffic.

Fake accidents

One of the many types of fake accidents involves two e-bikes. A criminal duo follows the car until it stops in traffic at an intersection. One of the riders then lightly bumps into the car with his e-bike. Naturally, the driver opens the door to take a look, unlocking all the doors in the process. After the driver gets out, the other criminal rides up, opens the passenger door, grabs the purse, and speeds off between traffic. The first rider shrugs, claims there's no damage and rides off.

Fake accidents like this are much harder to pull off when you actually have to pedal.

Conclusion

E-bikes and motorcycles are not the root of the problem – people are. However, people can't be changed quickly, so we are left with the unsavory yet effective option of banning the tool. Yes, to a certain extent, it is throwing the baby out with the bathwater. But when the baby bears the number of the beast in multiple languages, sometimes you gotta do what you gotta do.