



POULSBO POLICE STREET BEAT

EDITION 6



What constitutes an electric bicycle versus an electric motorcycle under Washington State law, and what are the rules for operating them on public streets and sidewalks?



ELECTRIC-ASSISTED BICYCLES (AKA: E-BIKES)

An electric-assisted bicycle is defined as a bicycle with two or three wheels, a saddle, fully operative pedals for human propulsion, and an electric motor of no more than 750 watts (RCW 46.04.169). These are divided into three classes:

- Class 1: The motor provides assistance only when the rider is pedaling and stops assisting at 20 MPH
- Class 2: The motor can propel the bicycle without pedaling, but assistance stops at 20 MPH.
- Class 3: The motor provides assistance only when pedaling and stops at 28 MPH. Riders must be at least 16 years old, and helmets are required.



Electric-assisted bicycles are treated like traditional bicycles, meaning they can be ridden on roadways, bike lanes, and multi-use paths, with some restrictions for Class 3 on sidewalks and trails.



ELECTRIC MOTORCYCLES

If the vehicle requires no pedaling and can exceed e-bike speeds or power, it falls under motorcycle classification. Electric motorcycles must meet full vehicle safety standards, including lights, mirrors, brakes, and registration, to be street legal.

LEGALITY OF OPERATING ELECTRIC MOTORCYCLES ON PUBLIC STREETS & SIDEWALKS

Electric motorcycles are not legal to operate on public streets unless they are fully registered as motorcycles with the Washington State Department of Licensing, equipped with required safety features (such as headlights, taillights, turn signals, and mirrors), and operated by a licensed driver with a motorcycle endorsement (RCW 46.61.710). They are prohibited on sidewalks, bike lanes, and pedestrian paths, as these areas are reserved for non-motorized use or low-speed devices like e-bikes (RCW 46.61.261). There is no provision in the Poulsbo Municipal Code allowing electric motorcycles or neighborhood electric vehicles on city streets or sidewalks without meeting state registration requirements.

SAFETY CONCERNS FOR CHILDREN OPERATING ELECTRIC MOTORCYCLES

Allowing children to operate devices classified as electric motorcycles raises significant safety risks. These vehicles can reach high speeds without the need for pedaling, leading to loss of control, severe injuries from falls or collisions, and head trauma, which accounts for a high percentage of related hospital visits. Children under 16 lack the maturity, judgment, and physical coordination to handle motorized vehicles safely, especially on public roads where traffic is unpredictable. State law prohibits anyone under 16 from operating Class 3 e-bikes, and electric motorcycles require a driver's license with motorcycle endorsement, making it illegal and dangerous for minors. Parents should prioritize helmets, supervision, and sticking to age-appropriate, low-speed devices like traditional bicycles.

PENALTIES FOR UNLAWFUL OPERATION ON STREETS & SIDEWALKS

Operating an unregistered electric motorcycle on public streets and sidewalks is considered a traffic infraction, with fines starting at \$150, escalating to misdemeanors for repeated offenses or if it involves endangerment.



THE BOTTOM LINE

Washington State law clearly distinguishes electric-assisted bicycles, which promote safe, active transportation, from electric motorcycles, which require full vehicle compliance for road use. Devices like those made by Surron are not street legal and pose hazards, especially to children. Follow state registration rules, use appropriate paths, wear helmets, and teach safe riding habits to prevent accidents and citations. These guidelines enhance predictability and protect all road users in our community.



Do you have a question you would like us to answer in a future Street Beat? Email us at streetbeat@cityofpoulsbo.com.