

CAA Position on Pedelecs (E-Mountain bikes)¹ and E-bikes



The demand for and supply of e-mountain bikes and e-bikes have been growing constantly for years. This trend is playing out independently of the positions held by the Alpine associations, but it demands their engagement. Most of the Alpine associations in the CAA have adopted positions regarding mountain biking as a mountain sport, and have developed guidelines, brochures and training courses on sportive facets as well as nature-conservational and socio-cultural affairs. They are yet also sometimes involved in regional and inter-regional mountain biking schemes. In the concepts, e-mountain bikes are now treated as equal to mountain biking. Therefore the following principles of the CAA associations are to understand as a general and super-ordinated position.

Definition and delimitation

Bicycles with electric motors are generally divided into e-mountain bikes (**pedelecs**) and **e-bikes**.

- On an **e-mountain bike (pedelec)**, the motor only assists the riders while they are pedalling. Regarding legal matters, e-mountain bikes are equivalent to bicycles, and may be used without an insurance label or a driving licence as long as the electric motor does not provide more than 250 W of continuous output and automatically switches off at speeds in excess of 25 km/h.²
- **More powerful s-pedelecs** provide greater assistance, while **e-bikes** can be ridden without the rider having to pedal at all. Both of these require an insurance label, are put on a level with motorized traffic and have by law no permission on hiking and cycling trails!

The terms "e-mountain bike" (pedelec) and "e-bike" are often used interchangeably in practice, with no clear distinction being drawn. The following statements apply merely to e-mountain bikes (pedelecs).

The basic position of the CAA associations

The CAA associations advocate movement powered by one's own body and can therefore support cycling in the mountains with classic e-mountain bikes under certain conditions: In the CAA's view, it doesn't contradict the principle of movement by physical power. In return, the CAA associations do not support cycling in the mountains away from public road traffic with e-bikes and tuned pedelecs (> 250 W continuous output, assistance in speeds > 25 km/h).

The e-mountain bike opens up new perspectives for the pursuit of mountain sports. Whether e-mountain bikes are used purely for mountain biking, as an alternative means of accessing other mountain activities, as sports equipment in heterogeneous groups or as a mode of transport for everyday purposes: – the use of e-mountain bikes can make the experience of mountain biking more accessible. Nonetheless, the CAA associations have adopted a quite critical view of the increasing use of e-mountain bikes in the alpine terrain. In particular, the rise in the number of users and their expanded range means that

¹ E-mountain bikes (E-MTB) here refers to classic pedelecs, see definition and delimitation. Although the term "pedelec" is technically correct, it is hardly used colloquially. Instead, the term e-mountain bike (E-MTB) has become common for pedelecs with mountain bike character.

² This definition refers to the [EU-directive 2002/24/EC](#). (In Switzerland, "e-bike" is an overarching term for all electric bicycles with pedal assistance. In order to be legally equivalent to a bicycle, E-MTBs / pedelecs with up to 500 watts of power and a maximum pedal assistance of 25 km/h are permitted.)

environmental and socio-cultural conflicts can arise or be intensified. When it comes to the use of e-mountain bikes in the mountains, there is thus an essential need for training on aspects relating to nature and the environment, handling, range and dangers, as well as an introduction to basic riding techniques for beginners.

The **CAA's "Mountain biking – safe and fair"** recommendations also apply in principle to e-mountain bikes.

Mountain sports and e-mountain bikes

On the one hand, the ability to receive assistance from an electric motor while cycling or mountain biking opens up opportunities to groups of people with less affinity or ability for mountain sports; however, this option is also increasingly being used by skilled and experienced mountain bikers to allow them to reach more distant and/or challenging destinations with less physical effort. This means that on a combined activity trip, for example, the participants' energy can be saved for a following alpine tour or ski tour, allowing this stage of the trip to be organised more safely. Additionally, e-mountain bikes offer common MTB experiences to persons with very divergent physical conditions, because differences can be balanced. On the other hand, the increased range and ability to access higher, more mountainous destinations using mountain bikes assisted by electric motors also demands an additional understanding of riding techniques and possible risks. The Alpine associations therefore recommend suitable preventive work.

Alpine infrastructure and e-mountain bikes

The legal provisions relating to the use of **trails** by bikes and mountain bikes in general and e-mountain bikes in particular differ considerably in each of the Alpine countries. When it comes to the permitted use of trails in each country or region, in principle, the CAA associations advocate the respectful and considerate shared use of exclusively suitable trails by both hikers and mountain bikers, including e-mountain bikers. Pedestrians have always priority. Especially where the use of trails by bikers is prohibited by law or there's no consent of the landowner and the trail keeper, this is to be respected in any case. The increasing use of e-mountain bikes may in certain cases lead to a rise in potential conflicts due to larger numbers of users and the higher speeds of cyclists, especially uphill. In response to this, the CAA associations' tactics generally comprise pleas for consideration for others, respect, self-responsibility and individual case resolution as well as differentiated intervention measures instead of bans or prohibitions. The intervention measures should be developed jointly. This requires a clear marking in maps, literature and signage.

The **huts** belonging to the Alpine associations are often popular destinations for mountain bikers. E-mountain bike riders can not expect charging stations on huts. When planning a tour, the battery capacity and charging time in relation to the length of the day should be considered.

Conservation, environmental protection and e-mountain bikes

In terms of conservation and environmental protection, the CAA associations invariably apply the same recommendations to classical e-mountain bikes as to mountain biking in general:

- Avoid in particular erosion damage by only using suitable and authorised paths and trails with appropriate riding techniques and speeds. The acceptance of the use of trails for mountain biking in general by land owners and trail keepers depends especially on this aspect.
- Respect plant and animal habitats
- Show respect to game, especially during dusk and dawn
- No cross-country riding
- Pay heed to existing restrictions relating to conservation and environmental protection
- Leave no traces or rubbish behind

- Behave in an environmentally responsible manner while travelling to your destination

The growth in e-mountain bike users, some of whom have yet to receive much experience, and the simultaneous expansion of their range into more Alpine regions is resulting in an increase on the pressure put on the landscape and natural environment in some areas. The Alpine associations can counter this with comprehensive training measures and awareness-raising campaigns, but they expect also a sensitization of the users by other involved organisations.

Tourism and e-mountain bikes

Tourist organisations in many places are working to expand their services for mountain bikers and especially for e-mountain bike riders. Cable cars are receiving more use, for example, and bike parks are being built. Biketourism – with or without electric tailwind – can be a financial mainstay for alpine communities regarding an all-the-year-long season. In principle, "peaceful coexistence" should be the goal. The Alpine associations due to their experience can confirm that active and attractive guidance is an effective tool for countering conflicts and problems that may arise due to the multiple use of trails in intensively used areas. At the same time, the CAA associations demand the involvement of all stakeholder bodies, such as tourist organisations, local authorities, cable car operators, landowners, trail keepers and conservation associations as well as sports associations, in cooperation with the local biking scene, in order to develop suitable and workable services and solutions for the specific situation in each location.

Approved by the CAA General assembly on September, 16th, 2017 in Malbun/Liechtenstein, updated by the General assembly on September, 11, 2021, online.