

## Audio file

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## Transcript

### Speaker 1

It's time for the Outspoken Cyclist, your weekly conversation about bicycles, cyclists, trails, travel, advocacy, the bike industry, and much, much more. You can subscribe to our weekly podcast at [outspokencyclist.com](http://outspokencyclist.com) or through your favorite podcasting app to listen anytime. Now here's your host, Diane Jenks.

### Speaker 2

Hello and welcome to The Outspoken Cyclist. I'm your host, Diane Jenks. Thanks for tuning in today. Before we get to our guest, I want to give a huge shout out to our very own Bike Cleveland Executive Director, Jacob Van Sickle. Jacob was named Professional Advocate of the Year by the League of American Bicyclists at the National Bike Summit a couple of weeks ago. Jacob has taken what was the fledgling Bike Cleveland organization and put it on the national stage in many ways. Our cycling experiences here in Northeast Ohio have been immensely enhanced by his leadership. So a big congratulations to Jacob. In this, the second in our series on e-bikes, I speak with Larry Peasey. Larry is the president of Pedigo, a longtime senior executive in the e-bike industry, and an active participant in national policy and advocacy efforts, collaborating with brands, dealers, and organizations like People for Bikes. While Larry's views don't particularly contradict with those of Hans Ray, who was my guest in the first of this series, they do bring up important aspects of the conversation that Hans and I didn't cover. Larry and I have known each other for a really long time and he too offers his opinions about e-bikes and what we, specifically the industry, need to be thinking and doing so that access to e-bikes remains viable for everyone, not just riding on trails. Larry has laid out his call to action plan for us around three points, safety, access, and innovation. Hi, Larry. Welcome back to The Outspoken Cyclist. It's great to see you again. Thanks for joining me.

### Speaker 3

Great to see you as well, Diane. And thanks so much for having me.

### Speaker 2

Well, you know, we've known each other a very long time. Even back in the days, I think you were still in retail. And I like your opinions, your ideas. I wanted to get your perspective on the e-bike issues. And there's a lot going on that we need to get straightened out in the industry. In response to Hans's letter, which we will put up on our

site March 2nd, you penned an op-ed with probably some expanded perspectives. So where do you and Hans agree about e-bikes and what's going on?

Speaker 3

Well, I think Hans and I agree on more than we disagree. We both see a real risk that if we blur the line between true bicycles and electric motorcycles, especially on natural surface trails, will lose the hard-won eMTB access and public trust. We both believe stealth e-moto products, machines that ride like motorcycles but are marketed as bicycles, don't belong in the same bucket as legitimate e-bikes. And there's a direct threat to trail access as a result. We both agree the industry has responsibility to use clear definitions to avoid misleading marketing, which is happening in this category, and support enforcement against products that deliberately live in this gray zone, this emoto gray zone that we absolutely need to correct.

Speaker 2

Who is putting out Misleading marketing. Explain what you mean by that. That's a term I didn't I haven't heard from anybody right now, but yet I have a feeling that it's out there.

Speaker 3

Yeah, well, you know, as you know, I chair the electric bicycle subcommittee at our industry association, People for Bikes. And, you know, we have a stats committee that track all these brands in the space. Believe it or not, there are like 750 brands that have entered the marketplace in the United States, many of them through marketplace platforms, but many of them that just pop up regionally, they ship a container or two, a product into a third-party logistics warehouse. Most of these are in near the port in California. And they have a website. Sometimes they hire salespeople and they go out and start selling these products that are e-motos, higher power, faster speed than a legitimate e-bike, and they market them as e-bikes. And it's highly confusing, primarily to parents that are buying these things for their youngsters, primarily teenagers. And Johnny comes home from school and says, Billy got a really cool e-bike, and I'd like to have one, too. And mom, this means you won't have to drive me to soccer practice. And mom says, oh, wow, I hear that e-bikes are legal. And yeah, sure, I'll get you on. And it's just-- it's become a huge problem.

Speaker 2

A container, too, doesn't mean there's a lot of backup for this bike. Where are they being manufactured? Are these all Chinese?

Speaker 3

Well, I would say the landmark share of them are, the e-bike supply chain is a Chinese supply chain for the most part. Even if the frames aren't constructed in mainland China, the components for the most part are and what determines country of origin is where

the frame is constructed. It's complicated, but yeah, I would say they're mostly Chinese companies that just pop up and start distributing their product.

Speaker 2

That brings up a lot of questions for me about having them repaired and, you know, batteries that are problems and off-brand everything from pedals to handlebars.

Speaker 3

Sure, well, you know, look, in most instances, these are low quality products that don't meet any of the compliance standards. And, you know, if the company survives and some of them have and they've gained, you know, some momentum in the market, then, of course, they have backup after-service parts, and they build a dealer network that can service these things. But I would say most of them don't, and they're flash in the pan. People think that they can make some substantial amount of money by doing this, and they don't worry about the legal issues that they might be confronted with by building these products and marketing them, falsely marketing them as compliant e-bikes. Some of them actually come to market as compliant e-bikes, but then they're switchable. It's like on the various social media platforms, they post things that tell you how to download an app and make it go faster. It's bad behavior, and there's not been any enforcement. Talk about where we should be deploying Customs and Border Patrol. How about there?

Speaker 2

RAOUL PAL: Right, right, right, right. As opposed to people, how about products that don't belong in the US? So that brings up so many things for me. And I guess we need to talk about regulation. And where is it that you and Hans did not necessarily come to the same conclusion about what he was talking about, which is basically trails.

Speaker 3

Yeah. Well, where I think Hans falls short is in how narrow his perspective and lens is. He's looking primarily at class one EMTBs on singletrack. And that's an important piece, but it's not where most e-bike trips happen. You know, the majority of e-bike riding is on streets, bike lanes, you know, shared use paths. neighborhood greenways. And that all supports commuting and running errands and family transport and deliveries. There's a lot of e-bikes being used for commercial deliveries, food service deliveries, et cetera. And if we let one use case, sport mountain biking, which is Hans's thing, define what the entire category is allowed to be, we risk freezing innovation, and we're undermining the mobility needs of millions of riders who may never set a tire on single track.

Speaker 2

Yeah, that is very narrow. And I didn't somehow in my conversation with him, that's not what I came away with. But I understand that now. Where is the industry in this? You just completed the Bicycle Leadership Conference, which for people who don't know,

People for Bikes puts on this conference that is sort of a comprehensive overview of the bicycle industry going forward. And so now we're at 2026. We're already looking into 2027. What was the e-bike discussion at BLC?

Speaker 3

Well, the thread of e-bikes ran through the entire conference because let's face it, you know, e-bikes are the driving force of getting more people on bicycles today. And while, you know, I'm never going to abandon my human-powered e-road bike or my mountain bike. I have e-bikes, and I use them for specific purposes. And with every passing year, I appreciate having them when I climb the hill in front of my house to get into my driveway.

Speaker 2

Are you saying we're getting older?

Speaker 3

Yeah, no.

Speaker 2

Something along those lines. OK, so We have also, and I don't know who is bringing this up, we have a whole generation of younger people who are saying, I don't want a car.

Speaker 3

Yeah.

Speaker 2

And so now e-bikes belong there. We also have seniors who are not going to be driving necessarily, who are going to want e-bikes. What's legislation looking like? And what do we need to do to define e-bikes and get the e-motos, which are really overly powered and not really bicycles at all. They're really electric motorcycles, in my opinion, right?

Speaker 3

Well, yeah, they are. And whether they have pedals or not, they're not low-speed electric bikes as defined by the federal law. So we built a class system, a three-class system, so that use could be regulated properly for the different types of e-bikes that are in the market. And we learned this early on when we were trying to pass legislation. It all started in California, where the three-class legislation was signed into law first. And the intent behind that was we realized there was a broad spectrum of what the federal law defined as a low-speed electric bike. And look, you know, that was signed into law in 2002 and the technology has evolved dramatically since 2002. So we can't just leave things where they are because there'll be bad outcomes. But you also just can't change the code of federal regulations by doing things haphazardly at the state level.

Otherwise, we have a patchwork of, you know, legislation and It's impossible as a manufacturer or distributor of these products to be compliant everywhere if there's different regulations at the state level. We're working hard as an industry to align, and we're trying to tamp down bad legislation and support good legislation. the differentiator is really these e-motos. And it's simply-- we used to call them out of class electric vehicles, and that didn't resonate. And what we find is that every time there is an issue, the media refers to these things that we now call e-motos as e-bikes. So it gets conflated in the media, and we've been using e-motos, and we're trying to get the media to refer to them as e-motos when they're talking about something that is faster, more powerful than a low-speed electric bike as defined by the federal law. And we're having some success. It's happening. There was an academic study, a Minetta study, conducted last year, and they referred to e-motos and they concluded that, look, the bulk of the problem here is not low-speed electric bikes as defined by federal law, but it's these e-motos that are either switchable or just out-of-the-box, more powerful and faster than the constraints of low-speed electric bicycles.

Speaker 2

I want to take a moment to remind our listeners we're speaking with Larry Pizzi. He is the chair of the e-bike.

Speaker 3

Electric bicycle subcommittee.

Speaker 2

Subcommittee. And he's the CEO of Pedago. And he's been a friend for, I won't even tell you how long, because that really puts the date on us. I want to talk about, oh man, this is so weird. I want to talk about the use of the word moped. which we used to use. And it seems to me, why can't we somehow even get away from the whole e-something for these higher power bikes, that e-bikes are e-bikes and they're bicycles, or maybe we need to say e-bicycles, something that actually defines them in a way that the public understands, because they don't seem to understand what they're really buying.

Speaker 3

Yeah, this is true. I think that the differentiation-- I mean, people have adopted e-bike as a category of product. The challenge has been is that anything with two wheels and an electric motor, they've been referring to as an e-bike, even if it's not compliant. So eMoto describes that it's an electrically powered device. But it's higher power, faster speed than an e-bike. And calling them e-mopeds is a possibility. Clearly, there are differences between a moped and a motorcycle. But they are-- the regulations around mopeds, as we knew back in the '70s when they had some short term of popularity in the United States when gas prices, during the oil crisis of the '70s, they became popular. But they use internal combustion engines, and the displacement of those engines defined whether it was a moped or a motorcycle. And the regulations were formed

around those differences. So things have evolved A lot. We have all kinds of electric conveyances these days, and the regulations need to be updated to keep up with that. Defining low-speed electric bicycles and putting them into these three different classes was the beginning. It's not the end. E-bikes have really proliferated since we have established the three-class legislation in now, I think, 45 or six states. And we need to continue to update the legislation so that it keeps up with innovation and new technology as it unfolds.

Speaker 2

I think we also might have an issue with the idea of an emoto being powerful enough that it needs regulation, as in insurance, licensing, helmet laws that apply to motorcycles. So unfortunately, and then you have the whole dealer network that is either going to go toward a motorcycle shop or toward an IBD, an independent bicycle dealer. It seems to me it's very complicated and I'm wondering how we can simplify it so that I know a lot of bike dealers now are really dependent on this e-bike category to make money, to be able to actually stay in business. And every major manufacturer, Trek, Specialized, they all have e-bikes now.

Speaker 3

Sure, and it is the fastest growing segment, while everything else, unfortunately, is declining. So, you know, look, we have to be real about what is an e-bike and what is something other than an e-bike. And that is precisely what the federal definition of a low-speed electric bike was intended to do when it was signed into law in 2002. So again, technology and innovation have been deployed, and things need to evolve. And we do need to have, I think, a federal rulemaking to change the code of federal regulations so that we can better regulate and define what gets imported into the country as a bicycle, an electric bicycle, as opposed to these other electric conveyances. I don't think there's necessarily anything wrong with what we're calling e-motos, but they need to be licensed, insured, and registered. You shouldn't need to wear a helmet. The problem is these are being sold primarily, in my opinion, to teenagers that parents think they're buying a compliant low-speed electric bike, and it turns out to be a product that can go 40, 50, 60 miles an hour. Somebody that hasn't gotten their driver's license or gotten any training or passed the tests so that they have a realization of what the regulatory landscape is around motor vehicles, gets on these things, and it causes the chaos that we're seeing in so many American cities today.

Speaker 2

So is there any interest from the, I guess it's the IIHS and the NTSB, the insurance market and the automobile industry that we're going to see some lawsuits coming up if young kids are going to get injured or worse on these bikes and the parents don't get it. And who is telling them what they're buying?

Speaker 3

Yeah, well, I think there's growing interest from, you know, from a number of constituents. So, you're probably aware that in New Jersey, at the end of last year, signed into law on the first or the last day of the outgoing governor's term, a really bad piece of legislation that swept up everything, you know, e-bikes, e-motos, into a requirement for licensing, registration and insurance. It's supposed to start being enforced in June or July. Well, it's caused complete chaos in the state because, well, you can't register something that doesn't have a VIN number.

Speaker 2

Right.

Speaker 3

Low-speed electric bicycles are federally defined as a bicycle, so you don't need a VIN number. You can't title them, obviously, without. And so, registration is, you know, very challenging. And basically, they've thrown the baby out with the bathwater. And it's going to get sorted out. I'm confident. But it was pushed through in two months, which is really pretty rare. This kind of thing doesn't happen. But there are unusual circumstances that circulated around the passage of this law. The good news is that the cycling community is up in arms. The State Motor Vehicle Commission doesn't really know how to handle this, and it was really not well thought out, but it was a runaway freight train. As an industry association, we tried to get in front of the lawmakers, but they didn't really want to hear anything. They just wanted to get this done and signed by the outgoing governor, which they did successfully on his last day in office. So, it will now require an amending bill. And you know, we hope to hope to get it amended because today, the hundreds of thousands of people that use low speed electric bicycles responsibly in New Jersey don't know what to do, you know, and stores that sell bicycles. And as you just said, Diane, the bicycle industry, bicycle retailers are so dependent on the revenue from low speed electric bicycles. They haven't sold any since this bill was signed into law. And I've even heard from many that people that bought them last year are coming into the store saying, I'd like to return this. So it's just caused total chaos.

Speaker 2

Wow, that's just crazy. I thought there was another state that was banning e-bikes, but mainly from trails. So that's another question that we actually haven't talked about that issue. And that is e-motos are wreaking havoc with off-street paths, trails. I mean, they are so high speed, it's like taking your car down the towpath.

Speaker 3

Yeah. Well, they're motorcycles. So let's face it, they should be constrained or restricted. for places where you can ride a motorcycle on natural surface trails. And there are places where you can do that. I know in California, there are off-road motorcycle recreation areas in the state. You can ride them on private lands, but on public lands where there's trail access for mountain biking, they don't belong. And so there's a role

here for enforcement. And that needs to be deployed if we're going to solve this problem. But it all starts with, what are we letting into the country? And is there any regulation at the border to ensure that we're not letting these things that masquerade as e-bikes into commerce?

Speaker 2

I like that. It all starts at the border. Seems like a lot of stuff starts at the border these days. In your piece for Bicycle Retailer, you talk about a value-driven call to action. What do you mean?

Speaker 3

So my call to action is built around really three values, safety, access, and innovation. So safety means clear classes, honest labeling, responsible product design, and real consequences for stealthy motos and reckless riding on trails and in cities. Access means we protect and manage trail use with clear rules and strong etiquette, but we also recognize e-bikes as essential mobility for seniors, disabled riders, immigrant workers, under-resourced communities. Innovation means we don't freeze the category at a first-generation definition. Instead, we channel new form factors better electronics and battery designs and configurations, smarter controls towards outcomes that we care about to lead to fewer crashes and more car-free trips. It's so gratifying to see in the community that I'm living that we've created more connected communities. We have seven schools in like a two-mile radius where I live. in a very hilly community. And my awareness of this started when I started working from home during the pandemic and saw my neighbors drive out of their driveway with their kids loaded in the back and not returning for a half an hour, 45 minutes from a carpool line to drop off their kids. Right. And today, I have seven or eight neighbors that now have long-tail cargo bikes that carry their two children, and they ride up the five-degree hill in front of my house to the top of the hill where most of the schools are located. And 10 minutes later, I see them riding back down. Look, people are adapting these new forms of getting around. in a very efficient and productive way. And look, those of us that have been in the cycling community for as long as we've been in the cycling community have to acknowledge the fact that getting people out of their cars and onto bikes is good for everybody. And the regulations haven't kept up. The enforcement of the regulations is lacking, but there's an opportunity to fix this. in a mindful way where, as I said earlier, we're not throwing the baby out with the bathwater. E-bikes, low-speed electric bicycles, as defined by federal law, are not the problem. These e-motos are the problem.

Speaker 2

They are. They are indeed. And I want to see the next generation of parents teaching their kids to ride and not schlepping them around in, you know, SUVs, which is a big problem. I'm glad you're seeing that change in your neighborhood. We've been speaking with Larry Pisi. He is one of the founding people of our industry these days who is working really hard to keep e-bikes where they belong, on trails for people who

need to ride. I really like the idea. I speak with a guy in New York City several times a year. And we always talk about the delivery system, that city bike rental and how many e-bikes are they have and how it since congestion pricing was instituted, how much better it is to get around in New York on these bikes. So I can see a whole other part of the industry or the, you know, the community that needs to have these bikes available.

Speaker 3

Absolutely. They're essential for so many reasons. We just have to make sure we protect what we have and further define the regulations so that we can ensure we can keep going in a positive direction.

Speaker 2

The last thing I want to ask you is, is there anything listeners can do to voice their both opinions and concerns to get this happening?

Speaker 3

That's a great question because I don't think most people understand this, but individual riders have more influence than they might think. At a local level, they can show up at public meetings, they can talk with parks and transportation staff, they can support policies that distinguish bicycles and true e-bikes from these electric motorcycles instead of lumping everything together. At the state level, They can support balanced three-class e-bike laws, appropriate speed and power limits by context, and investments in protected bike lanes and low-stress networks. This is essential. We have to build infrastructure. I mean, you go to the Netherlands, where e-bikes really became mainstream first in the world. And there's infrastructure for these different types of vehicles. And it all works in complete harmony. And we haven't done that because, as you know, we have to fight for every dollar for bicycle infrastructure. And so many times, we wind up getting bumped for other reasons. But infrastructure is key. When people have infrastructure and they feel safe, They get out of their cars, and they utilize bicycles and e-bikes to get around. And when they don't feel safe, they don't. And so there's a lot to do. But individuals, you can pick up your phone and call your state assembly person or senator when there's an issue that confronts your locality at the state level. get involved, use your voice. It's much more meaningful. voting for good bike infrastructure and for appropriate bike legislation is low-hanging fruit. And you don't speak from a commercial interest like the industry does. So your voice is loudly heard. So use it.

Speaker 2

Great advice. Well, we've been speaking with Larry Peasy. I love talking with him because he's so well-informed and we will stay in touch. We are going to post your letter back to the industries and we hope that e-bikes will continue to evolve at class one level.

Speaker 3

Great. Well, thank you so much, Diane.

Speaker 2

Thank you.

Speaker 3

Great to talk to you again.

Speaker 2

You too. My thanks to Leary for his well-formed thoughts and opinions about the e-bike versus e-moto situation. As of this conversation, there is much going on all over the country in an effort to help define and sort out the myriad issues that surround these bikes. Thank you for listening. I hope you enjoyed this second part of our series on e-bikes and the dilemma facing everyone from parents of kids who are asking for these bikes to communities that are trying to deal with ambiguous regulations and enforcement. You can find the link to Larry's letter as well as the Mineta study he referenced on our website, [outspokencyclist.com](http://outspokencyclist.com). Coming up in our third and final e-bike conversation, People for Bikes, Matt Moore and Ash Lovell will lay out the strategies that the organization is exploring and implementing for taking on many of these issues around e-bikes, legislation, enforcement, definitions, and more. In a final note of passing, I want to offer our heartfelt condolences to his family and express a profound sadness. everyone in our bicycle world is feeling at the passing of Tim Blumenthal. Tim was a pioneering voice in our bicycle world for his journalism, broadcasting, and advocacy. He will be fondly remembered and greatly missed. I've posted a link to the obituary on our website. Remember that you can find links, photos, and a written transcript of the show at [outspokencyclist.com](http://outspokencyclist.com). Follow me on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube. And subscribe to my Substack for additional commentary on this and many other topics. Please stay safe, stay well, and remember, there is always time for a ride. Bye-bye.

Speaker 1

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