

## **E-Bikes & SMBC: Understanding the Rules, the Benefits, and the Path Forward**

Electric bicycles are transforming cycling across the country, and Sarasota and Manatee Counties are no exception. Each year, more riders join the roads and trails on pedal-assist bikes, some returning to cycling after time away, some continuing to ride as they age, and others discovering group riding for the first time. At the Sarasota Manatee Bicycle Club (SMBC), e-bikes now make up a noticeable and growing presence on many of our rides.

With that growth comes a responsibility: making sure all members—traditional and electric—understand how e-bikes fit into Florida law, local regulations, and the expectations of our group rides. The smooth functioning of every SMBC ride depends on predictability, communication, and trust. When everyone understands how e-bikes behave and how they should be used in group settings, we protect the safety and enjoyment of the entire club.

### **What Exactly Is an E-Bike in Florida?**

[Florida law](#) defines an e-bike as a bicycle equipped with fully operable pedals and a small electric motor no greater than 750 watts. [E-bikes are considered motor vehicles](#) under state law, which means riders enjoy the same rights and responsibilities as all cyclists—riding with traffic, obeying signals, signaling turns, and using required lights at night.

The state recognizes three classes of e-bikes. Class 1 and Class 3 provide pedal-assist only, while Class 2 models add a throttle. These distinctions matter because they affect how the bicycle accelerates, how it is regulated locally, and how predictable its behavior is when riding in a group.

One important local rule all members should note: **Class 3 e-bikes are not allowed on sidewalks in [Manatee County](#) and the rider must be a minimum age of 16.** These higher-speed pedal-assist bikes must stay on bike lanes, shared-use paths, or public roads. Florida law allows many freedoms for cyclists, but local regulations always take precedence in areas where safety requires it.

### **SMBC's Position on Class 2 E-Bikes**

SMBC welcomes e-bikes on many of our group rides, but with one important restriction: **Class 2 e-bikes (those with throttles) are not permitted.** This decision was made for safety reasons. Throttles can change the way a bicycle accelerates, making it difficult to maintain a steady group pace or hold a predictable line when conditions are tight. In pacelines—where riders may be only inches apart—smoothness matters more than anything else. Sudden bursts of speed, even accidental ones, can create dangerous gaps, wheel touches, or chain-reaction crashes.

**Class 1** and **Class 3** pedal-assist bikes, on the other hand, behave much more like traditional bicycles. Riders must still manage their speed carefully, but the bike responds in a way that is more compatible with SMBC group riding.

### **Why E-Bikes Matter to Our Club**

One of the greatest strengths of SMBC is its inclusiveness. E-bikes allow riders who might otherwise struggle—because of age, fitness, or injury—to remain active members of the cycling community. Many riders who once worried about falling behind now find themselves able to participate fully, keeping pace with friends and enjoying the physical and social benefits of group riding.

Pedal-assist technology also opens doors for newer riders who want to try longer distances or more challenging terrain. A strong headwind, the Ringling Bridge, or the climb over the island Causeway can discourage some riders; with assistance, those same obstacles become manageable. The technology doesn't diminish the ride—it expands access to it.

### **Group Riding With E-Bikes: What Riders Should Know**

While e-bikes offer many benefits, they do require thoughtful handling in group settings. E-bikes tend to weigh more than traditional bicycles, which affects braking distance and maneuverability. Riders should leave slightly more room and brake smoothly, especially on crowded rides or during sudden stops.

Acceleration also differs. On a traditional bike, regaining speed after a stop or hill happens gradually. On an e-bike, especially at higher assist levels, acceleration can be quicker than expected. Riders must take care not to surge past the group or leap ahead unintentionally. Smoothness, not speed, is the priority.

Communication remains essential. Announcing passes, signaling turns early, and pointing out hazards help keep everyone safe. E-bike riders must be especially aware of how their speed changes may appear to riders behind them and should give clear verbal cues whenever they reposition in the group.

Just as important is understanding your battery. Running out of assist unexpectedly can create safety issues if you're deep into a long ride or far from the start location. Riders should know their battery range, how terrain and speed affect consumption, and plan conservatively.

### **Battery Charging Safety: A Growing Area of Awareness**

As e-bike use grows, so does the need for responsible battery charging. Riders should always use only the manufacturer's charger, inspect the battery regularly, and charge in a

ventilated space. One of the simplest and most effective safety recommendations is to use an **outlet timer** to limit charging time and avoid overheating. And of course, no rider should charge a battery unattended or overnight. These habits protect not only the rider's equipment but also homes and community spaces.

### **The Most Common Crash Types—and How E-Bike Riders Can Avoid Them**

Florida's crash patterns are well known: right hooks, left crosses, driveway conflicts, unsafe passing, and door zone collisions. Because e-bikes often travel slightly faster than traditional bicycles, visibility and predictability become even more important. Clear signaling, correct lane positioning, and making eye contact with drivers help reduce misunderstandings. Controlling speed in areas with heavy pedestrian traffic or limited sightlines is essential.

### **The SMBC Standard: Ride Safely, Ride Predictably, Ride Together**

E-bikes offer tremendous advantages, and when used thoughtfully, they blend seamlessly into our group rides. Riders using pedal assist are expected to maintain the posted pace, communicate clearly, avoid overlapping wheels, and ride a consistent line. These are the same expectations placed on every SMBC rider, regardless of the bike they ride.

At the end of the day, what matters most is the community we build on the road. Whether you power your ride with your legs alone or with a little help from a battery, we're all united by the same mission: staying active, riding safely, and enjoying the camaraderie that makes SMBC special.

[E-Bike Presentation Deck](#)