

Motorcycle

GUIDE



Electric Trend

Motorcycle sales in the United States have been sluggish lately, but manufacturers have rebounded by both attracting new riders and responding to environmental concerns with the introduction of electric motorcycles.

While older and veteran riders cherish the roar of the engine and have long mastered shifting gears, new and millennial riders are seeking a quieter experience with a shorter learning curve. Electric motorcycles achieve both these goals with scooter-like ease.

Besides hop-on-and-go simplicity, electric motorcycles, like their electric car counterparts, offer an eco-friendly ride eliminating carbon emissions and doing away with hot engines and exhaust pipes that can be hazardous. They also qualify for federal and state tax credits.

But all this practicality comes at a price. While prices continue to fall, some of the higher-end bikes, such as Harley-Davidson's Livewire (starting price: \$30,000) are beyond the financial reach of most young, novice riders.

Electric motorcycles also suffer some of the same disadvantages as electric cars. Small battery sizes means less range, a factor that is enhanced over long distances and higher speeds.

Bikes like the Livewire are clearly marketed toward an experienced,



MARCO VERCH/CREATIVE COMMONS

The Harley-Davidson Livewire on display in Berlin in 2019.

upscale rider ready for a new challenge, but Harley indicates that they'll be introducing lower-priced electric rides aimed at different customers.

Harley is hardly alone in the electric motorcycle market. Upstart manufacturers such as California-based Zero sell bikes starting at \$9,000. Zero's FX ZF3.6 offers an estimated 27-mile range per charge on small, easily interchanged batteries. Zero motorcycles also have no gears or transmissions, and their teams travel the country to capture the attention of prospective riders by offering training on electric bicycles before riders hop on a Zero motorcycle.

Swedish motorcycle maker Cake aims its \$8,500 Ösa+ at the youthful urban market. Resembling a dirtbike, the Ösa+ features detachable clamps that allow it to be quickly customized with cargo racks and an additional seat.

Cake's models are particularly popu-

lar with the new, young riders on whom they've focused their products and marketing. Simple, lightweight, easy to ride, customizable and relatively cheap, the Ösa+ is quickly making inroads with the younger generation as the new street transportation of choice.

Domestic and European models are facing competition in 2020 from a wave of Chinese-made electric motorcycles that focus on lower-power, commuter-friendly models that will be even more friendly on the wallet.

Among these Chinese brands is the City Slicker, a lightweight, urban electric motorcycle imported from Zongshen by California-based CSC. The Slicker's smaller battery pushes it up to city speeds of 45 mph, similar to scooter-style performance and priced at \$2,500.

These are just a few examples of a developing motorcycle trend that will likely expand similar to the popularity

of electric cars. But before you buy, visit local motorcycle dealers to see, talk about and ride an electric motorcycle. While you're at a dealer showroom, you'll also likely find notices for local clubs that can connect you with electric motorcycle owners to do even more research.

Iconic motorcycle companies like Harley-Davidson are proving they aren't relying on just their name and core gas-powered models with entries like the high-performance Livewire and promised new lower-priced models featuring their famous nameplate. New makers like Zero and Cake are enticing younger generations with the joy of riding by addressing both their economic and ecological concerns.

With advancements in technology, lower operating and maintenance costs, and government incentives, electric motorcycles are poised for an exciting future.

Motorcycle Jeans

When people think of motorcycle riding gear, they likely think of leather.

Leather looks cool, but it can be stiff and uncomfortable, sweaty and impractical for some riders. Beyond leather, most riders don't put much thought into riding pants, most often resorting to simple denim jeans.

But even the toughest denim doesn't offer much protection, so where to turn? The answer: motorcycle jeans.

Designed to offer maximum protection and style, discerning riders have been adopting motorcycle jeans as part of their permanent riding wardrobe, and there are plenty of brands, styles and price points to choose from.

CHOOSING YOUR JEANS

Finding a pair of comfortable, chic and protective motorcycle jeans is like any clothing purchase, which is to say shopping for them is sometimes fraught with decisions over price and style. Because there are a growing number of manufacturers, motorcycle jeans now constitute their own segment of the riding apparel market. Here are some tips to help you find the perfect pair.

Fit: Shopping for motorcycle jeans is just like shopping for regular jeans, or any piece of clothing for that matter. To make sure they fit, you'll want



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to try a pair on. Like most things these days, motorcycle jeans are available online, but for the best experience you'll want to visit a local retailer that specializes in riding gear. Experts at your local retailer can guide you through the variables in quality, price, style and fit.

Protection: Besides style, the major concern with riding jeans is protection. The best jeans offer both impact protection and abrasion resistance. But you'll have to make

a compromise in style to get both. Some riding jeans offer only limited protection at key areas such as the knees, but it's worth the extra money to ensure you get as much as you can in all three areas: style, fit and protection. Be sure to look for CE-certified jeans, a rating that ensures full protection to the most sensitive areas of your lower body.

Style: Like denim jeans, motorcycle jeans come in a variety of popular styles —

regular/straight cut, tapered, slim and loose — to accommodate every body style. But remember, the point of riding jeans is not just how they look, but how you'll feel riding in them. Be sure to try on a few different styles before you buy.

Budget: It also pays to do some research before you go shopping to determine which brands offer the best style and protection for your budget. For example, if you are a casual rider not interested in

the extremes of off-roading, then purchasing top-of-the-line jeans doesn't make sense. Motorcycle jeans vary wildly in price, from \$50 to as much as \$500, so be sure to spend some time at your local cycle gear store discussing your riding style and needs before buying.

Once you've got all these areas covered, you can confidently pick the proper pair of riding jeans to meet all your specifications and ride in style, comfort and safety.

Sidecars and Trailers

Hitching and mounting things on motorcycles has been around since the invention of the two-wheeled vehicle.

SIDECARS

Because early motorcycles weren't powerful enough to carry two passengers, the sidecar was born out of necessity and quickly became a must-have accessory.

The popularity of sidecars peaked from the 1920s to 1940s, but they've never actually disappeared nor have they changed much since they were quickly perfected. Harley-Davidson still manufactures sidecars, and other companies make custom rigs, but the modern sidecar is remarkably similar to its early design.

Today, the sidecar has made a resurgence, thanks in part to the popularity of ATVs. Not much beats the thrill of speeding along in the outdoors without actually having to drive. New sidecar production is on the rise in the U.S., and the vintage market has taken on a life of its own.

Like motorcycles themselves, the popularity of sidecars experienced a boost in the 1970s. While sidecars occupy a specialty niche of the industry, these ride-along cars offer a great way to achieve practical balance on motorcycles while bringing



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along a friend or using the space to carry extra items.

Almost any motorcycle is capable of accommodating a sidecar, but there are a few things to consider before you purchase one.

Adding a sidecar requires some modifications to your bike to allow for changes in weight and handling. These modifications largely depend on whether you choose a detachable sidecar or one that is permanently affixed to the frame. Enter your budget.

One rule of thumb when

considering sidecars is that most can cost as much as half the value of your motorcycle, usually thousands of dollars. Prices vary from lower-end kits that attach to a bike or custom models that can drive the price up exponentially.

While you can always view sidecars online, it's always a good idea to visit your local dealer to take a look at various models up close. The most popularly available model is manufactured by the Russian motorcycle company Ural, the only manufacturer

to produce factory-made sidecars. You'll find a wide selection of vintage models in magazines, in your local newspaper and online, as well.

TRAILERS

Another hook-up for motorcycles are trailers, an excellent way to extend the ability to haul things on short and long trips. Small trailers can aid in carrying groceries and supplies, while larger versions can pack in luggage and larger items — even campers

that can carry even more cargo.

Naturally, you'll need a bigger bike with power and strong brakes to attach such trailers, but for those with larger touring bikes or three-wheelers such as the popular Spyder, additions come in many shapes and sizes.

A stop by your local motorcycle dealer will provide you a great start with the sort of sidecars and trailers available that can work with your model of bike.

Improve Your Riding Skills

Ask anyone who rides and they'll tell you the No.1 reason they drive a motorcycle is because they're fun. They also likely point to fuel efficiency. But motorcyclists also know they're moving targets for other drivers, and danger is always lurking.

The hard truth is that motorcyclists are dozens of times more likely to be injured or killed in a crash than their car-driving counterparts. The figures for older riders are even higher, as many return to motorcycles after years of inactivity on a two-wheeler, only to suffer more accidents because of slower reflexes and weaker eyesight.

The good news: Many riders enjoy a lifetime of motorcycling without suffering any injuries. Why? Because safe riders know their limits, understand their machines and practice safe riding techniques. Here are some safety tips suggested by Consumer Reports to make sure all your rides go smoothly and safely.

Don't buy more bike than you can handle. If you've not been riding for some time, you'll likely be taken aback by the performance of modern motorcycles. Even models with smaller engines are faster



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and more powerful. Choose a bike that fits, one that you sit on comfortably. You should be easily able to touch the ground with your feet and reach the handlebars. If the bike feels too heavy or sways under your control even when just sitting on it, consider a smaller motorcycle, at least until you feel more confident.

Invest in anti-lock brakes. Widely available on a range of modern bikes, anti-lock brakes are a proven lifesaver. Even if you are a skilled rider, ABS technology can brake better than you can, according to vehicle safety programs. Under this control, your brakes are less likely to lock up, skid and crash. With ABS, you can more easily maintain control of your bike, even in

slippery conditions.

Hone your skills. No matter how you judge your skills, you can benefit by taking a course from the Motorcycle Safety Foundation. These courses are widely available and teach critical skills from the basics to such advanced techniques as evasive maneuvers. Search online for the Motorcycle Safety Foundation to sign up for a course near you.

Wear your helmet. This should go without saying, but helmet laws are not consistent state to state, and some states are repealing helmet laws. But the facts are clear: Riders without a helmet are 40% more likely to suffer a fatal head injury in a crash and are three times more likely to suffer brain injuries than those with

helmets, according to government studies. The Department of Transportation suggests choosing a full-face helmet the department approves (check for the DOT certification sticker). Modern headgear is strong and lightweight, and cuts down on noise and fatigue.

Wear the proper gear. Don't go riding in just casual clothes, such as jeans, T-shirts or sandals, even on short trips. Protect yourself from the elements, bugs and debris by wearing either leather or reinforced riding jeans, gloves and, of course, a helmet. If you don't have a visor, use goggles to protect your eyes. If possible, wear a reflective vest or bright colors to ensure other drivers can see you.

Drive defensively. In many

car-motorcycle accidents, the driver of the car is most often at fault, often because they didn't see the motorcyclist. Driving defensively and staying alert to the traffic around you will help protect you. Be extra mindful of cars suddenly changing lanes or pulling away from curbs or entering from side streets. Also keep a safe distance from vehicles ahead of you to ensure you have enough time to stop or swerve if they suddenly brake.

Bad weather and road hazards. Be especially careful when riding in poor weather. Rain cuts visibility and reduces traction. If you find yourself riding in bad weather, slow down, be gentle on the brakes and throttle and beware of gusting winds that can put you off balance. Because motorcycles have less contact with the pavement, road debris such as pebbles, sand or wet leaves can cause a bike to slide. Bumps and potholes also pose more danger than when you are driving a car. Slow down when encountering these obstacles.

Check your bike before each ride. Inspecting your motorcycle before each ride will help ensure your lights, horn and signals all work properly. But don't stop there. Check the chain, belt, shaft and brakes. Also, check the tread on your tires and be sure they are properly inflated. When tires are under-inflated, handling and steering become more difficult because the bike doesn't want to lean, say safety experts.

Benefits of Off-Road Riding

Many people buy motorcycles not as less-expensive commuter vehicles or to take to the open road on a long trip or tour, but for the thrill of riding itself.

Nothing exemplifies that excitement more than off-road or dirt biking.

Motorcycles were designed to deftly and easily adapt to all sorts of terrain that can create some unforgettable experiences. Besides the boost of adrenaline, you can also vastly improve your riding skills and more easily identify tweaks to your bike to allow it adjust to various conditions at faster speeds while offering you greater control.

Even at slower speeds, off-road biking offers the excitement of experiencing trails, mountains and wilderness, taking in the sights, sounds and beauty of nature. Here are a few other benefits off-road and dirt biking enthusiasts swear by.

Stress relief: Every motorcycle rider will quickly relate the mental benefits they get from riding. Nothing much beats the freedom riding a motorcycle allows. Riding off road offers further benefits, transferring your thoughts



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and concentration solely on your machine and the environment around you. Think of it as a reset button for your cognitive thinking and an endorphin rush unmatched by any drug.

Physical benefits: Riding any motorcycle brings physical benefits because of the strength and balance required. Dirt and off-road bikes up the ante, providing a real workout (and, oftentimes,

soreness). Riding on natural terrain uses every element of your body, strengthening your core and giving all your muscles a workout. In addition, your heart rate is elevated during the ride, providing a great cardio workout.

Versatility: When the winter rolls around, some street riders are naturally apprehensive about riding, garaging their bikes and turning back to cars for the season. But dirt

and off-road bikes are truly all-season rides, designed to tackle each season with only some slight modifications. In fact, adapting the bike to the season is often part of the fun.

Relationships: The two-wheeled community on streets or off roads offers a great opportunity to meet fellow motorcycle enthusiasts. Riders share camaraderie and many shared interests, aiding and advising others and shar-

ing tips and riding experiences they otherwise might be unaware of. These relationships often develop into life-long friendships.

Family ties: Most off-road motorcyclists often share their passion quickly and easily to members of their family. Because bikes come in all shapes and sizes designed for young and older riders, off-roading can become a valuable family experience. As a parent, you can offer life lessons and many teachable moments riding outdoors.

Enhanced skills: Riding off road increases your awareness of your surroundings, enhances your ability to maneuver and encourages you to think quickly about obstacles and oncoming danger zones — all traits that transfer to street riding. Because you have less traction and wheel slippage on a dirt bike, you'll be able to become less tense when encountering environmental situations that occur on the street.

Learning skills: Riding takes skill, but like all new hobbies or pursuits, your interest level is in direct correlation to the value you place on it. Riding skills and maintenance increase rapidly, especially in the more extreme environments posed by off-road biking. An added benefit is that you'll learn more about the sport and yourself, skills that are transferable to every aspect of daily life on both personal and professional levels.

Saddle Up With Saddlebags

Some motorcyclists choose larger, touring-style bikes, known affectionately as “baggers,” because they want to ride long distances and these bikes often come with pre-attached saddlebags designed to carry supplies that smaller bikes can’t manage.

Saddlebags are most generally used to carry things you ordinarily could not accommodate on a motorcycle. The two major types of saddlebags are throw-over and hard-mount saddlebags.

During the boom era of motorcycles in the 1960s and ‘70s, motorcycle travel grew to the point that it became necessary to carry gear and luggage over longer distances. Prior to the introduction of pre-installed bags, riders often drilled holes into the fenders of their bikes to attach leather bags. The industry took notice and began to produce both pre-installed saddlebags and throw-over leather bags more easily installed with newer models.

But if your bike doesn’t already come with saddlebags — or if your non-touring bike can accommodate them — there are plenty of options



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available. Whether you choose leather or fiberglass, here are some common features you should look for when visiting your local dealer.

First, look for features. You’ll want to look for all these options before going further

with any set of bags: locks, mounting hardware, quick-release buckles, reinforcement and detachability.

Saddlebags that lock are almost a no-brainer, but some cheaper bags don’t have locks. Locks give you peace of mind

that your gear — helmets, gloves, tools, carry-along items, etc. — are all secure and safe when you park, either overnight or just for a few hours.

Mounting hardware is always a necessity for serious

saddlebags. Cheaper throwover bags that come with strings or ties leave your bags vulnerable to theft or, worse, falling off your bike while you ride. Mounting hardware ensures your saddlebags are properly secured to your bike to guard against these issues.

Whether your bags are leather or hardcase, you’ll want to be able to quickly and easily release them from your bike to take along with you if you don’t want to leave them or the valuable items inside when you park. These easy locks also provide you quick access to the bag openings themselves.

Leather bags look great, but like all skins, they can sag over time because of wear and exposure. Reinforced hard bags on a metal frame suffer no such issues and can last much longer, sometimes over the lifetime of the bike itself or longer.

Another factor is how easily the bags come off the bike. Most riders leave their saddlebags on their motorcycles for long periods of time, but sometimes it’s advantageous to remove them altogether. In this case, it’s always good to know the bags can be removed from the bike fairly easily in under a few minutes.

Finally, saddlebags can add a new styling option for your bike. They can be painted to match other painted features of the motorcycle, such as the gas tank, or emblazoned with all sorts of illustrations or decorations, adding another element of style to express yourself.

Bike Rallies and Events for 2020

If you're truly born to ride, then there's a motorcycle rally or event almost everywhere in the United States every month of the year to meet up with fellow biking enthusiasts.

Motorcycle gatherings feature not only a chance to get to know other bikers and develop relationships, but are often attended by manufacturers and dealers. Plus, there's always live music, food and other side events designed to entertain. Here's a curated selection of events for the remainder of 2020. (Be sure to double check the dates of events, as scheduling might have been affected by COVID-19-related social distancing measures.)



ALEX THOMSON/CREATIVE COMMONS

BAMA BIKE FEST
Forkland, Alabama
June 25-28
and Oct. 29-31
bamabikefest.com

Travel north and west from Daytona to Alabama and you'll find this old-school biker festival and show just south of Tuscaloosa, a famous NASCAR hot zone. It's a raucous adults-only festival full of the type of events older motorcycle events were known for (think wet T-shirt contests, lots of drinking, the barrel roll, etc.). The event features free campgrounds with hot showers

(bonus!) and lots of bands.

LACONIA BIKE WEEK
Lake Winnepesaukee,
Laconia, New Hampshire
June 13-21
laconiamcweek.com

Motorcycle rallies are not just Southern events. If you're interested in heading up north, Laconia Bike Week is the destination. Going way back to 1916, this nine-day festival is truly the grandfather of all bike events. Unlike some others, it's regarded as a tamer, more family-friendly gathering around an expansive lake amid the beauty of the New Hampshire countryside. There are plenty

of events, live music and food, as well as great rides to be had.

**REPUBLIC OF TEXAS
BIKER RALLY**
Austin, Texas
June 11-14
rot rally.com

This massive four-day event brings together all things Texas — bikers, music and food, as well as races, attractions and vendors. This rally draws hundreds of thousands of motorcyclists and fans to the Texas music capital — this year featuring the Steve Miller Band and Blackberry Smoke — for its 25th anniversary. While it's an adults-only show, the event is

famous for its motorcycle parade through downtown Austin.

HOGROCK
Cave-In-Rock, Illinois
June 11-14
hogrock.com

Another adults-only show, this midwestern rally features a huge center state with lots of bands, entertainment and events in an almost non-stop format. It's a weekend-long party — emphasis on party, billed as the "Hottest Little Party in the Midwest" — that draws crowds from Kentucky and Tennessee and points further for a low \$40 entry fee.

**STURGIS MOTORCYCLE
RALLY**
Sturgis, South Dakota
Aug. 7-16
Sturgis.com

The premier motorcycle rally in the U.S., indeed the largest in the world, Sturgis was launched in 1938 by the Jack Pine Gypsies. Across 10 days, some 500,000 attendees double the population of South Dakota in this small town where top-shelf bands entertain while enough vendors to fill several malls bring their wares to the masses. A bucket-list trip for many bikers.

BIKES, BLUES AND BBQ
Fayetteville, Arkansas
Sept. 23-26
bikesbluesandbbq.org

Back down south in Arkansas, this charitable show is another family-friendly affair features great rides through the Ozarks Mountain foothills, where riders cruise into town for a feel-good event packed with entertainment and fun.

**ROSCOE'S CHILI
CHALLENGE**
Nov. 5-8
Lakeland, Florida
roscoeschilichallenge.com

Closing out the year in early fall back in Florida, Roscoe's Chili Challenge began in 1986 as a small biker cookoff that has grown into a hugely popular event in central Florida. The weekend-long event revels in the cool atmosphere amid great entertainment, food (chili, of course) and campgrounds.