

Sanyo rolls electric bicycles into US market

January 8 2010



Japanese electronics giant Sanyo Electric displays a truck with solar panels for charging electric powered bicycles in Tokyo in December 2009. Eneloop "pedal-assist" bicycles that had been exclusively available in Japan made a US debut at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas.

Japanese electric bicycle titan Sanyo thinks that notoriously car-loving folks in the United States are prime for peddle power.

Eneloop "peddle-assist" bicycles that had been exclusively available in Japan made a US debut at the [Consumer Electronics Show](#) in Las Vegas, where attendees go to saddle-up and ride in a carpeted casino hotel ballroom.

"We think of it as an electric vehicle," David Politis of Sanyo North America said before letting AFP take one for a spin.

"It is designed for people who want to commute to work and not be sweaty or who want to get back on the bike for the first time and may be out of shape, or even a mom who needs a little help peddling to keep up with the kids."

A "dynamotor" built into the hub of the front wheel charges a bicycle's battery when it is cruising downhill or a rider is braking.

The motor kicks in when a rider peddles, providing a virtual wind at one's back and making inclines feel more like flat terrain. Each bicycle have three gears changed with twists of a handlebar grip.

Three is a power boost mode for daunting uphill climbs.

Eneloop bicycles weigh in at 50 pounds (23 kilograms) each and the luxury of sweat-free peddling comes with a steep 2,300-dollar (US) price tag.

"Sanyo thinks it is clear that energy consciousness and environmental awareness continue to grow around the world," Politis said.

"We have to do something to break US dependence on foreign oil."

Most car trips in the US are less than five miles (eight kilometers), and cars pump out the bulk of polluting gases in the first 20 miles (32 kilometers) of a trip, according to statistics cited by Sanyo.

China is reported to be the top market in the world for electric bicycles, with India ranking second and Europe taking the third spot.

Sanyo is the world's top maker of rechargeable batteries, many used in cars or trucks.

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Citation: Sanyo rolls electric bicycles into US market (2010, January 8) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-01-sanyo-electric-bicycles.html>

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