Pedego electric bicycle juices up commute to train station

The motor makes hills and head winds a breeze, and there's no need for a motorcycle license and insurance as there would be with a scooter.

For years I contemplated selling my car and riding a bicycle to work.

I would ride to the Tustin train station four miles from my Irvine home on a bike path that would put me just half a mile from the station. From there I would take the Metrolink train to work in downtown Los Angeles.

But the few times I tried riding my road bike, I was exhausted by the time I got home. Getting there was easy — all downhill — but coming home was sheer agony, grinding up hills after a long workday. The road bike went back up on the rack in the garage.

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A Pedego City Commuter electric is shown bicycle at the Metrolink train station in Tustin. The motor is built into the hub of the rear wheel, so the only sign of non-human power is the inconspicuous battery pack strapped to the luggage rack. (Peter Pae, Los Angeles Times / May 30, 2013)

By Peter Pae, Los Angeles Times

June 1, 2013

Electric cars are getting as cheap as gasoline rivals

Motorcycle mpg: 10 very fuel-efficient bikes

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would require a motorcycle license and insurance.

Then I tried something in between — an electric bicycle from Pedego, a 5-year-old company co-founded by Don DiCostanzo, a former carwash mogul. He believes that electric bikes are the future, especially in sunny Southern California, and preaches this gospel to anyone who will listen.

He's winning over some high-profile converts: The Pedego electric bicycle even gets a thumbs up from Google Inc., which has begun offering it at a subsidized rate to employees at its Mountain View, Calif., campus. Apple Inc., Microsoft Corp. and Tesla Motors Inc. are doing the same.

At first glance, it's hard to tell that the Pedego is anything other than a casual bike. The motor is built into the hub of the rear wheel, so the only sign of non-human power is the inconspicuous battery pack strapped to the luggage rack.

But Pedego can get you up a hill, no sweat. Topping out at 20 miles per hour (the self-imposed limit to keep the two-wheeler in the bicycle category), an electric-powered Pedego can easily go spoke-to-spoke with the lightest, fastest road bikes — yet it retains all the comfort and smooth ride of a cruiser.

But the economics of the Pedego are what sold me.

Like most everyone who has bought a Pedego, I had to get over some sticker shock. The Dutch-style city commuter I rode was nicely built, with top-notch components, but $2,500 for a bicycle? (Other Pedego models range from $2,000 to $3,000.)

But then I started thinking of all the money I could save if I used this thing to commute. I could dump my car — that's about $3,000 a year in gas, insurance, maintenance and registration, not to mention the lump sum from selling the vehicle. And there's no need for new insurance or a license, as with a scooter.

It's still a bicycle, after all, which meant I could cruise the extensive bike trails and lanes in Irvine. And with the electric motor helping me out, hills or head winds would be a breeze.

It turned out to be a no-brainer. With a combination of pedal-assist and electric throttle, I could go anywhere with ease.

In pedal-assist, the electric motor adds a little juice to your pedaling. That's handy for a middle-aged man like myself, who wants to get a little exercise — or at least pretend to — without too much exertion. I initially pedaled with the setting at "5" — meaning the electric motor at full power — which required little effort beyond moving my legs up and down. After several days, I gradually reduced the setting to "2" and got a little exercise. Now I sometimes pedal with the motor off completely.

The Pedego costs next to nothing to operate — about $2.50 a month on my electricity bill. A full recharge takes four to five hours using the regular household AC plug and gives the bike a range of about 25 to 50 miles depending on weight, terrain and how much of the electrical power I use. I usually plug in the charger before I go to sleep so Edison charges me a lower nighttime rate.

Bottom line: The bike would pay for itself in about 10 months, not counting the extra cash from the sale of my car. And I've cut my daily trek down by about 15 minutes, compared with driving traffic-clogged streets to the train station.

Riding the Pedego has proved so addictive, in fact, that I even find myself looking forward to the commute.

Consumers can buy a Pedego bicycle online at [http://www.pedegoelectricbikes.com](http://www.pedegoelectricbikes.com) (the company delivers the bike to the home fully assembled) or try one out before buying at Pedego stores in Cardiff by the Sea, Carlsbad, Corona del Mar, Dana Point, Huntington Beach, Newport Beach, Santa Barbara, Santa Monica and Seal Beach.

A Pedego tent with various models for test rides is scheduled to be at Great Park Farmers Market in Irvine on Sunday.

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RafelHusain at 9:51 AM June 03, 2013
I use my own 48lb 35 mph (with pedaling) ebike to commute 35 miles one way from corona to UCL.
I use metrolink for 25 miles and pedal/ebike rest.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UDGP7PO1__Q
video of my bike
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DonDiCostanzo at 2:22 AM June 03, 2013
M Roger Lindern,
Bikes do get stolen but that's why they make locks!
Cars get stolen and motorcycles get stolen.
So don't buy a bike, motorcycle or car because they might get stolen?
By exercising a little prevention, chances are unlikely your bike would get robbed.

M. Roger Linden at 2:57 PM June 01, 2013
The problem is this: bicycles get stolen all the time. It's almost inevitable. It's bad enough when you spend a few hundred dollars on a bike and it gets stolen; it's a nightmare if the bike costs $2500. So unless you can deal with the prospect of buying a $2500 bike and having it stolen, you are setting yourself up for disaster.