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eGO Electric Cycle Enters DC Marketplace

By [Connie G. Estion](#), October 08, 2001

First of one articles

Why use a backhoe when a mere shovel will do? Such is the philosophy behind Fairhope, Alabama-based eGO Vehicles, Inc., a company founded less than two years ago that conceptualized and now produces the "eGO Cycle," a pure electric, emissions-free vehicle.

The small, 98-lb. eGO cycle, which looks a bit like a cross between a bicycle and a motorized scooter, was designed for a broad range of people who need a convenient, fast and friendly way to get around. People, for example, who recognize that it's unnecessary to fire up a 250-horsepower SUV to drive down the block to run some errands, who would love to bicycle to work but who don't want to work up a sweat in the process, who are looking for an environmentally-friendly transportation alternative, or who want to find an easy way to zip around town without having to fight for parking spaces or slog through traffic.

Sound like one - or all - of those target markets could be you? Yeah, well, it appears that eGO has done their homework. Because the eGO, simply put, was designed to meet the needs of a huge range of people on the go.

According to Robin Dvorak, director of business development for the company, the eGO is more practical than a car in some areas, especially when you consider that 60 percent of automobile trips are less than five miles long. Additionally, 50 percent of all automobile trips are for personal errands, and the average trip length for running errands is under seven miles. "A car is really overkill in most environments and situations," Dvorak said, "especially in planned communities where home, work and shopping are close by."

It all sounds convincing, but scooters and mopeds have been around a long time. How are any eGOs different?

Dvorak points to a few distinctions: until now, she says, electric bicycles have required pedal-assistance. But those, she explains, are often impractical: those who want to bike don't want to drag along the extra weight of the battery and motor, while those who want a powered ride aren't going to want to pedal. Scooters, the little numbers that were so popular during my college days, are more like toys, she joked, without storage or cargo space. Plus, with their gasoline-powered motors, they're not as environmentally friendly.



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At the far end of the scale, mopeds and motorcycles are not considered alternatives for many because they are much faster moving and require special registration and driving tests.

So, how well do eGOs perform? First, they're simple and fast without being scary. With a maximum speed of 20 miles per hour, they're slower than some of the speed demon racing cyclists, but they're plenty fast enough to get you where you need to go in an urban environment. And with a maximum traveling capacity of 25 miles on a single charge, they can easily handle those average auto trip-lengths of five to seven miles. The eGO is also designed to look and feel like a bike, with familiar bicycle parts, big wheels, a traditional and adjustable bike seat, and rear baskets that are sized to fit grocery bags. A LED display will let you know how much battery power you have remaining, and tail- and head-lights provide additional safety on the road. In fact, they're designed to comply with U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) road safety standards. They can be locked with standard bike locks, and they can be stored outside under a tarp.

Second, they're easy to use. The eGO has two modes: "go far" and "go fast." Go far gives you a maximum of 15 mph with smooth, slow acceleration. Go fast gives you a 20 mph maximum with peppier acceleration. Test rides have shown that performance won't change much, regardless of which mode you use: the eGO could travel 24.5 miles on the go far mode when loaded with 200 lbs. on fast, flat terrain, and it traveled 23.5 miles with the same load on the go fast mode.

Third, they're cheap to operate. The eGO uses a standard three-prong plug that can be plugged into any household outlet. Charging a completely dead battery takes eight hours - the length of a standard workday or the length of a standard night's sleep - and uses just 10 cents worth of electricity.

Currently, eGO cycles are available in 14 markets around the country, including in the Revolution Cycles shop in Georgetown and in the SkooterCommuter electric vehicle dealership in Bethesda, Md.

Ultimately, eGO hopes to work with city officials to ensure that D.C. and surrounding communities are "eGO logical." In other words, plugs would be available at bike racks; Metrorail would allow the eGO cycle on designated trains, just as they allow bicycles; and surrounding jurisdictions would allow eGO cycles on bike trails, the majority of which currently only allow non-motorized vehicles.

Dvorak states that they have begun discussions with local country transport officials and local governments, with initial reactions largely positive and supportive.

Paul DeMaio, transit specialist for the City of Alexandria, confirmed that private, motorized vehicles (except wheelchairs) are currently not permitted on Alexandria trails. He added, however, that "I do believe we'll be seeing more bicycles, both classical and electric-assisted, in Alexandria. Electric-assisted bicycles are a great alternative to cars over short distances. Electric-assisted bicycles are less expensive to purchase and maintain, and they are better for the environment."

Clearly, the inability to ride eGO cycles on bike trails could seriously hamper enthusiasts' ability to ride to work safely and efficiently. It is an issue that, with time, eGO hopes to change through continued discussions with city officials.

Other downsides that consumers need to remember are that eGO cycles are truly a different breed: since they don't have pedals, and you can't just throw more gasoline in them when you're running on empty, you could easily find yourself stranded if you don't pay attention to the battery indicator and/or how far you've ridden without recharging.

Online chats between electric scooter enthusiasts - exchanged on "zappy," an electric scooter forum on a Yahoogroups listserv, also uncovered some confusion

about whether eGO owners need to insure or license the vehicle. Dvorak says it's not necessary in Virginia, but until dealers, departments of motor vehicles, city officials, police and insurers are familiar with the eGO concept, you may want to check your state's requirements, which can vary significantly. In Virginia, at least, it appears that the eGO Cycle would be classified as a "moped," which means that registration is not required, but it does mean that you must be at least 16 years old to operate one.

In one owners' experience, a confused DMV registrar said the eGO was a motorcycle, and only after much gnashing of teeth with a supervisor, she declared the eGO a motorized bicycle, or moped, which had to be registered in his home state. Next, the owner went to his local insurance agent, who concluded that it would be best to get a separate policy before using the vehicle on the streets. The owner merely observed, "I don't think I need any insurance to drive this thing. After all, the Motor Vehicle Department just gave me a registration sticker and never asked for an insurance certification!"

As is often the case, it appears that the eGO - like many new advances in technological products and services - is well ahead of the legislation that governs it.

But if I had to place a bet, I'd say that lawmakers will start paying more attention: in a recent article in The Orlando Sentinel, the Electronic Vehicle Association of America indicated that the market for battery-powered transportation is becoming red hot, especially in Asia and Europe. Last year, the association said, Japan had 2,600 electric vehicles on the road, while Switzerland had 3,580. And in December 2000, Zapworld.com, a California-based electric bicycle and scooter manufacturer, sold \$1.3 million worth of electric powered personal transportation vehicles - an increase of 87 percent over December 1999 sales.

The eGO Cycle costs approximately \$1700. For more information, visit www.egovehicles.com.

eGO Cycles are in stock at two dealers in the DC area. For local sales information contact [Revolution Cycles](#) in Georgetown at 202.965.3601 or [Skooter Commuter](#) in Bethesda at 301.674.6640. Stop in and take a test ride.

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