



Mike's View:

Electric Bikes and the Niagara Escarpment



▲ The Amego Wind Ion near the top of the Escarpment overlooking Dundas and Hamilton. PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS

By Mike Davis

We all know that the Niagara Escarpment can have a significant difference in elevation and a fairly steep grade between the top and bottom of the steep sections. So how do the latest electric bikes do on difficult Escarpment roads?

Electric bikes, known as e-bikes, are pedal bicycles with an electric motor that assist the muscle power of a rider. They take many forms, with different models varying how they assist the rider. Some are designed for more than one passenger.

After contacting several electric bike dealers to try out their bikes, I quickly realized

that in the e-bike world, we are still in the “Wild West” and it’s very much “buyer beware” for potential buyers!

I tried out two bikes distributed by Amego from their warehouse in Dundas. I can recommend one of them for climbing an Escarpment hill. Amego’s Peter Steinke is very knowledgeable about the business and I found him comfortable to talk to. The warehouse is also a repair depot. It has a great collection of various types of bikes. I tried a scooter called an Amego Wind Ion. Ion means it has a lithium ion battery. The look is similar to a Vespa often seen in Europe. The Wind was able to make it up the Escarpment slope from

Dundas to Greenville. It was a steep grade that went for about a km. The bike was straining, but made it without assistance from me. Note, I am a big guy, so any bike would feel my weight.

I also tried an Amego Bold Plus. It is called an open-framed bike, meaning it looks like a traditional mountain bike without the cowl found on a scooter. The model I tested stalled out on the Escarpment grade. It may have needed more pedalling assistance, but it was not optimally set up for me. I am used to a pedal bike with a small seat and the seat post set to my height. Pedalling the Bold, I could not keep the speed up, and I suspect the motor overheated and tripped out for its own protection.

Driving up the Escarpment is extreme, so when I went to try out the rental bikes at ESkoot Niagara in Niagara-on-the-Lake (NOTL), owner Colin Telfer said he did not allow the bikes onto the Escarpment slope. I tried a scooter and drove around NOTL to various sightseeing locales. I must say it was a lot of fun! The bike worked well on the very flat terrain.

Telfer says that the bikes have a total time of only about 2.5 hours of battery power if run continuously, but people use them for a full day. The renters stop at the many sightseeing locations, restaurants, wineries, hiking trails, so the day fills out nicely. These rental bikes likely take a real beating being out on the road all season, yet the bike I tried seemed to work well. ESkoot primarily uses Emmo bikes. I tried to contact the Emmo distributor for an interview, but my request was unanswered.

Checking the Internet for e-bikes along the Escarpment, I found an interesting claim

on a Hamilton dealer’s website that stated “It’s guaranteed to take you up any Escarpment in Hamilton with great incline power!” I contacted the dealer, but was told that they would not allow a test drive. Not allowing a test drive makes me suspicious of any claims made. I would not recommend having anything to do with such a company.

I sensed in doing my research that most of the e-bikes are produced offshore. Some, it appears, are slapped together for anyone with a few thousand dollars, who sell to unsuspecting customers. I would be concerned about repair parts and service availability throughout the life of the e-bike. You have to be comfortable with both your e-bike and the terrain it will be used on. That means you need to test drive your potential purchase where you are going to use it. If you are looking for an e-bike, I recommend spending some time on due diligence. Make sure the business is legitimate, has been in business for a while, and try to talk to their customers.

The Ontario Ministry of Transportation defines an electric bike according to weight, power, maximum assisted speed and control criteria. In considering an e-bike, make sure it has a permanently affixed label stating that the vehicle meets the definition (i.e. meets all the applicable criteria). No driver’s licence, no vehicle registration or plate, and no motor vehicle liability insurance are required. The maximum speed for which the bike is allowed to provide assistance is 32 km/hr, above which the electric motor shuts down. In Ontario, all drivers and passengers must be 16 years or older, and all must wear an approved bicycle or motorcycle helmet.

For the Amego e-bikes tested, the Wind Ion is priced at \$3,150 and the Bold Plus at \$2,450. Amego states that the price typically includes the PDI or pre-delivery inspection cost. ESkoot rentals are \$29 and up. **NEV**

