

# E-bike puts 525-mile charity ride in novice's reach

By Marc Sani

SAN FRANCISCO, CA—When Laura Heydt rolled out from the Hard Rock Café at Pier 39 to start a 525-mile ride from San Francisco to Santa Monica, she had never ridden in downtown traffic. But as she joined more than 225 riders heading south over the next eight days, she concluded there was safety in numbers and, besides, she had developed confidence in the bicycle she was riding.

With a few pedal strokes and a slight assist thanks to the Bosch motor powering her Haibike Trekking RX, Heydt merged into traffic, powered up a few hills, left downtown San Francisco behind, and started what for her was the ride of a lifetime.

“Right out of the gate I was in traffic. I thought it would be safe enough in a group but, seriously, having the bike I was on I knew I could do it,” said Heydt, who took part in this fall’s 14th annual Arthritis Foundation California Coastal Classic.

Heydt had Larry Pizzi at Currie Technologies to thank for the loan of the \$4,000 e-bike, a small side project for the Accell North America company to put an e-bike through its paces in a real-world event where cyclists average 65 miles a day.

And Pacific Coast Highway is a unique route—long sections of stop-and-go traffic, rolling hills, major climbs and sweeping descents on isolated sections as the road winds along California’s scenic coastline.

In July, Heydt went to Currie Technologies’ Izip store in Santa Monica to be fitted. The Haibike came loaded with hydraulic disc brakes, fenders, lights, touring tires and a rack. And the pedelec uses Bosch’s new 350-watt motor.

“I went to the store, met Larry, and they put me on a bike. I hit the first hill and just flew up it. I was hooked. It was the best thing ever,” Heydt said.

According to Pizzi, e-bike sales are on the upswing. “I spoke with Laura and she said she couldn’t have done it without the bike,” said Pizzi, who has spent the past 13 years in the e-bike industry. “She just had a wonderful time and enjoyed it unconditionally because the bike made it a possibility for her,” he added.

Heydt, 52, is typical of the riders who signed up for this year’s classic. Some are extremely fit; others are new to cycling and in varying degrees of fitness.

While Heydt doesn’t suffer from arthritis, the Orange County resident and her husband have long been involved with the Arthritis Foundation. She is a member of the Orange County board and her husband has served on the regional and national board. Heydt’s sister has rheumatoid arthritis and Heydt has become close to 15-year-old Caitlin Ryan, who suffers from juvenile arthritis. The teenager had both hips replaced when she was 12.

Most riders are over 50, and when they sign up they pledge to raise more than \$3,000 each. This year’s event brought in \$1.1 million. But organizers worry that as the population ages, participants may “age out.” E-bikes could make a difference for those who want to support the foundation but fear the long miles.

“Most people were pretty impressed when they saw the bike,” Heydt said. “First they asked how long the battery would last. And when I told them, it wasn’t what they expected to hear. Some hard-core riders asked why was I on an e-bike? I told them I wanted to show people what they could do—not everyone is in condition and fit. This bike gives everybody the opportunity to get on a bike.

“When I started talking about that, they understood. One man told me that if he had known about e-bikes his wife could have joined him,” she said. Several riders voiced interest in buying them and others suggested organizers find a way to offer e-bikes as an option for next year’s participants.

Pizzi pointed out that such comments are common. “These bikes can trigger a desire to do something that a person wouldn’t otherwise do,” he said.

As for reliability, today’s center-mount motors and battery packs are up to the task, providing power for 60 to 100 miles depending upon how much assist is used.

Heydt said she had no battery issues even on 85-mile days. “I tried to stay in the lowest setting and never wore the battery down. Pretty amazing,” she said. And Heydt is sold. After returning the Haibike, she and her husband plan to buy two electric bikes from Currie so they can ride together.

Regarding future sales, Pizzi pointed out that cause rides like the Arthritis Foundation’s are just one aspect of the market. E-bikes still remain at the core of transportation, general recreation and a growing “sport” category, exemplified by e-mountain bikes.

Nonetheless, e-bikes can play a significant role in getting people with some types of ailments outside and exercising.

**BRAIN**



Alex Cole and Laura Heydt (right) rode together as they completed the annual Arthritis Foundation California Coastal Classic. Heydt made the eight-day journey on a Haibike electric bike.