

Riders Rediscover the Trail with eMTBs

By Cris Cadiz

NEMBA supports the use of Class 1 eMTBs where legally permitted by land managers and owners. Class 1 eMTBs play an important role in enhancing accessibility, breaking barriers, and meeting the needs of individuals with health and mobility challenges.

E-bikes are here to stay, and that's a good thing. A few folks might grumble when an e-biker breezes up a brutal climb. And yes, some worry about trail damage, though studies show that responsible Class 1 eMTB use doesn't harm trails any more than traditional bikes. Rather, eMTBs are expanding access, helping riders stay in the game, and welcoming new folks into the sport we love.

From seasoned mountain bikers managing injuries and aging joints to total newcomers wanting to skip the steepest part of the learning curve, eMTBs open doors. They give confidence, freedom, and joy without removing the work. Riders still sweat, still fall, still earn the ride. And for many with physical challenges, eMTBs offer a chance to do what once seemed impossible.

WHO IS RIDING E-BIKES?

Here's how four NEMBA members are riding farther, smiling more, and redefining what's possible on two wheels.



Lisa Frazier, Greater Portland NEMBA

For Lisa, e-bikes are literally a life saver. A lifelong endurance athlete, Ironman, and experienced mountain biker, she went into cardiac arrest on a trail ride two years ago. When the paramedics arrived, she was in v-tach (ventricular tachycardia) with her heart beating at 253 per minute—then it stopped. She was revived and spent 10 days in the hospital, where she was diagnosed with ARVC (arrhythmogenic right ventricular cardiomyopathy), a rare condition that limits exertion and can cause sudden death.

With a defibrillator/pacemaker implanted, Lisa faced a future without the physical activities she loved. But a sports cardiologist green-lit one option: an e-bike. Now at 60 years old, she monitors her heart rate carefully and rides a few times a week. "It's a lifesaver," she says. "Walking doesn't do it for me, and hiking's not my thing. If it weren't for e-bikes, I'd be at home, probably depressed."

Pros: Freedom to stay active despite serious medical limitations

Cons: Heavier than a traditional bike

Advice: "Don't judge someone riding an e-bike. You don't know their story."

Bike: Santa Cruz Heckler SL + e-gravel bike

Bill Boles, Cape Cod NEMBA

Just shy of 80, our very own NEMBA Community Engagement leader Bill Boles has been mountain biking for 40 years and is still leading and sweeping group rides. He initially picked up a Class 1 eMTB to keep up with younger friends. As his right knee deteriorated, he qualified for an ADA exemption and tested full-powered models, eventually landing on a lighter, half-powered version that hits the sweet spot.

"No one seems to mind that I'm on an eMTB," he says. His bike is light enough that when he's riding with kids or beginners, he might not even turn it on. "My guess is that, over time, most people will switch to eMTBs."

Pros: You always finish with more smiles than miles on an eMTB

Cons: The motor's hum—he often shuts it off

Advice: Test a few models. Not all eMTBs handle well on cross-country trails.

Bike: Specialized Turbo SL Levo



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The Americans with Disabilities Act gives disabled riders the right to use e-bikes and other power-driven mobility devices (OPDMD) on mountain bike trails otherwise closed to e-bikes. The current exception is federal land.
www.ada.gov/resources/opdmds/

Bentonville. “It was fantastic,” she says.

Carrie didn’t want to try a new sport unless she really enjoyed it, and the ability to dial the power up or down made all the difference. “When it feels too easy, I shut it down and do the work.” Even after the learning curve of technical riding, she still loves it.

Pros: Choose your own level of effort, great for physical and mental health

Cons: Cost and upkeep

Advice: “Anyone can learn. Don’t be afraid to try.”

Bike: Specialized Carbon Turbo Levo 4

Carrie Everson, Quiet Corner NEMBA

Carrie hikes and works out regularly but hadn’t ridden a bike since age 14. She and her husband wanted to spend more time with their golfing buddies, who disappeared every weekend to mountain bike. So, a year ago, she and her husband rented eMTBs on a trip to New Hampshire. They first rode on paved paths, then on trails. She was hooked. Now 52, she’s fallen (literally and figuratively) for the sport. “I love the peace and quiet in the woods. It’s one of the best things I’ve ever done. I wish I started 30 years ago.”

She and her husband enjoy biking so much that they planned his 50th birthday around a five-day mountain biking extravaganza in



Cheryl Doyle, Quiet Corner NEMBA

After 25 years of mountain biking, Cheryl nearly gave it up. Despite her years of experience and finely honed skills, group rides felt harder, fun was fading, and her fitness and desire to ride took a hit. She increasingly struggled to keep up with stronger riders and participate in longer rides. Her fitness and desire to ride declined in a vicious cycle. Then she got an eMTB, and everything changed. “It’s been a total game changer. I wish I’d done it sooner,” she says.

Cheryl has encouraged many women and men to try mountain biking over the years, which includes helping Carrie Everson discover the sport through an e-bike. “If she had started on an analog bike, I think she would’ve quit. The e-bike gave her the confidence and strength to fall in love with the sport.”

eMTBs helped Carrie’s friends discover what she loves about mountain biking: the community, the scenery, and the freedom of the outdoors. “They absolutely fell in love with it,” she says.

Pros: Renewed confidence and joy in longer rides

Cons: None!

Advice: Don’t quit—just adapt

Bike: Trek Fuel 8 GX AXS T-Type



E-Bike Trail Access: Know Before You Ride

Here’s a quick rundown of state-level policies on e-bike use across some New England states. Just remember: local rules may vary, so always check trail-specific guidelines before heading out.

Massachusetts

E-bikes aren’t allowed on natural-surface trails marked for nonmotorized use unless the land manager says otherwise. Cities, towns, and state agencies can set their own rules—including speed limits—so check locally before riding. The Department of Conservation and Recreation allows e-bikes on paved bike paths.

Connecticut

Class 1 e-bikes are generally treated like regular bikes. That means lights and reflectors are required in certain conditions, but helmets are mandatory for all e-bike riders when on pavement or bike paths. Local municipalities can set their own bike and e-bike rules, so access may vary by town or trail.

Rhode Island

Class 1 e-bikes are allowed on state bike paths, and riders under 21 must wear a helmet. Trail access depends on the managing agency: the Department of Environmental Management (DEM) allows e-bikes on some of its properties, while trails managed by the Division of Planning and Development do not allow them.

New Hampshire

Class 1 and 2 e-bikes are allowed on bike paths and multi-use trails where traditional bikes are permitted. Riders under 16 must wear helmets. Local governments and state agencies can set trail-specific rules. In general, e-mountain bikes are allowed on natural-surface trails that are open to both motorized and nonmotorized use—but access varies widely, so check before you ride. For example: In the White Mountains National Forest e-bikes are allowed on any forest road or trail that allows motorized vehicles. But they are not allowed on non-motorized trails including those designed for mountain biking.

Be a good trail steward and help keep access expanding by riding respectfully and following posted rules.