Overview: E-bike hub motors

Proven, affordable hub motors remain the workhorses of the e-bike category

While mid-drive motors are all the rage in electric bicycles, hub motors remain the powerful, proven and affordable workhorses of the e-bike industry.

New hub motor brands are coming on to the market, while a growing number of bike brands are using them on new models — showing that hub motors still have much to offer the industry.

Eurobike newcomer Supercrystal, the company behind the much-anticipated Copenhagen Wheel, is giving visitors the chance to test its all-in-one e-bike wheel at Demo Day.

With all e-bike components packed into a single hub and controlled by a smartphone app, the Copenhagen Wheel demonstrates the kind of technology that, if successful, could make hub motors sexy again.

It’s been several years in development, but the company’s Andrew Schmidt says the Copenhagen Wheel will be shipping again.

The name stems from a 2009 grant given by the city of Copenhagen to the SENSEable City Labs at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology to develop an all-in-one wheel. Under co-inventor Assaf Biderman, associate director of the labs, the wheel became a commercial project.

The Copenhagen Wheel is a gearless hub motor that can be fitted in minutes on a standard bicycle. It uses regenerative braking and is controlled by multiple sensors. The wheel offers electric assist of between three and 10 times the rider’s pedal power. It’s available for 26-inch and 700c wheels.

Germany’s Tout Terrain is launching its first e-bike line at Eurobike and chose a new range of hub motors to power it. Known for its sturdy, low-maintenance touring and urban bikes, Tout Terrain turned to Go SwissDrive for its gearless electric drive system. The system also uses a Pinion bottom bracket.

Tour Terrain is launching five eXpress models: the Chiyoda, City II, B25 Power model adds extra hill-climbing and cargo-carrying ability to Klever’s existing R25 model, leading the company to urge customers to “Tow, climb, carry, explore.”

Darfon, which like Klever is based in Taiwan, is showing its hub-powered range of futuristic Besv bikes. The company points to its background as a multi-million-dollar enterprise that makes electronic components, including keyboards for Apple computers.

Kymco subsidiary Klever, which launched its e-bike line in 2013, is expanding its range with two new models. Klever’s distinctive e-bikes are aimed at urban riders who want practical transportation wrapped in a unique style.

The new models feature a higher torque version of Klever’s own Biaictron rear hub gearless motor, for better hill climbing.

B25 Power

If you live, work or shop in a hilly area, the B25 Power will give you amazing torque in every single gear, whatever you’re carrying. The B25 Power is also more efficient, so higher torque at low speeds also means a cooler motor and greater range. Take your gear, tents, shopping, kids trailers... further!

www.klever-mobility.com
Chinese giant Suzhou Bafang, now known in Europe simply as Balang, is the world's biggest maker of hub motors. It now has a European service center for after-sales support and OEM training. Balang's massive range includes everything from gearless motors to high-torque geared systems suitable for fat bikes.

The proprietary frame design used by Swiss company YouMo FG-O/213 is built around the battery rather than the motor. YouMo's cruiser-style bikes demonstrate another advantage of hub motors: The frame isn't compromised by the need to accommodate a mid-drive motor.

YouMo chose to house the battery lower and more centrally in the frame for better handling. Its bikes are equipped with Go SwissDrive rear hub motors.

“We chose a hub motor because the driving experience is great. The power from the motor is transmitted directly to the road, giving higher acceleration. Wear of the transmission parts is also much lower than with mid-drives, and recuperation of battery power is also possible,” said Joel Kurz of YouMo.

"Last but not least, a hub motor fit better with our cruiser-style geometry,” he added.

For 2016, the company is launching a single-speed model for rental fleets and B2B customers.

YouMo bikes also add the Go Swiss Evo display that is Bluetooth-enabled and compatible with smartphones.

Geared hub motors are one of the most traditional types of electric drive motors, but they are still finding applications in today's market.

Japanese firm SR Suntour A4-102 is launching a 500W, 45 kph (28 mph) geared hub motor that weighs 3.9kg (8.6 lbs.). Based on SR Suntour’s HESC ATS system launched in 2014, the new rear hub motor system features a frame-mounted battery and an optional 4.5-inch TFT color display. According to the company, Hercules and Bulls will use the 500W motor for the German market. The company says the system's acceleration is particularly impressive in test rides.

Heinzmann FG-O/311, which has one of the longest track records of any hub motor company, is partnering with Speedliner Mobility on a new range of electric assist transport and cargo bikes for industrial and business use. The new range features battery capacity up to 20Ah. Heinzmann said some models are capable of hauling loads of up to 300kg.

Radkutsche FG-O/404, another German firm exhibiting at Eurobike, produces everything from “rapid” cargo bikes to large capacity delivery vehicles. Its bikes have even been used by mobile pancake vendors.

"We find a front hub motor in a 20-inch wheel to be a great hill climber, even with very heavy loads," Stefan Rickmeyer of Radkutsche said.

One footnote: Höganäs, which promoted its Eclino hub drive system at last year’s Eurobike, has withdrawn from the electric drive market and instead will supply components to other manufacturers. Höganäs aside, it’s clear that hub motors won't be going away any time soon. — RICHARD PEACE

Richard Peace is a freelance bicycle journalist and publisher (richardpeacecycling.com)

Höganäs has also been updated. BionX’s large and distinctive D-Series hub motor, introduced at last year’s Eurobike, now has a proven track record. A D-series-equipped Wheeler B4-207 mountain bike won the World E-Bike Championship in the Italian Dolomites in June. Wheeler, a long-term OEM partner of BionX, continues to use BionX systems across its range.