

Cheaper China e-bikes 'kick in teeth' for UK firms



Lyle and James Metcalfe run e-bike company Volt and have a factory in Milton Keynes

**Oliver Smith**  
BBC business reporter

7 February 2025  
Updated 8 February 2025

**A government decision to scrap tariffs on Chinese e-bikes coming into the UK has been described as a "kick in the teeth for British manufacturing".**

Border taxes were imposed on Chinese e-bikes following Brexit, keeping the UK in line with the EU, but the Business Secretary Jonathan Reynolds has accepted a recommendation to lift them on non-folding e-bikes from Friday.

The Trade Remedies Authority, the body responsible for reviewing tariffs, said the move allowing cheaper Chinese imports could save consumers £200.

But UK-based companies have called the decision "strange" saying it's a blow at a "very scary time" for the industry.

British based e-bike companies expressed concerns about the impact of a potential "flood" of cheap Chinese e-bikes entering the UK.

James Metcalfe and his brother Lyle run e-bike company Volt and have a factory in Milton Keynes.

They previously manufactured their bikes in China, before moving operations to a factory in Poland, and then shifting manufacturing to the UK following Brexit.

"I think this is an odd decision, and a kick in the teeth for UK manufacturing," Metcalfe told the BBC.

"We brought our manufacturing here with assurances that this [tariffs on Chinese bikes] was a long term change. We've invested a lot in it. We're a small business, family-owned, and trying to do the right thing by building a quality product," he said.

The UK was already a very competitively priced market for bikes, with little need to bring in cheaper bikes from China, he added.

"What's the benefit? I don't see any. The government are saying there'll be savings for the UK consumer, but for years we've been pushing government to put through alternative savings like grants and subsidies for customers."

"Why not do what everyone else has done across Europe? Provide grants and invest in bike infrastructure in the UK," he added.

Metcalfe also questioned why tariffs for folding e-bikes from China remained in place.

"I'm all for protecting the whole industry and I find it odd that they're protecting one small part of it," he said.

On Thursday, the government said it had accepted a recommendation from the Trade Remedies Authority to revoke anti-dumping tariffs on Chinese e-bikes of between 10.3% and 70.1%, and taxes designed to counteract subsidies of 3.9% to 17.2%.

A government spokesperson said: "Defending UK industry from unfair competition is important, which is why we've taken the decision to continue protecting UK folding e-bike producers based in the UK, whilst also lowering prices for consumers and importers of other products."

The spokesperson added that the government was "continuing to take action on unsafe e-bikes" and had recently launched a campaign "to raise awareness of the risks of dangerous e-bike batteries and scooters".

'A scary time for the industry'

The UK bike industry has endured a tough few years following a boom during the Covid pandemic, which saw an increase in outdoor exercise and many people choosing cycling over public transport.

Post-Covid sales dropped dramatically, and many companies were left with stock they struggled to shift. A number of companies struggled, including Mercian and Orange Mountain Bikes, or ceased production, such as Islabikes.

David Miall, who runs e-bike company Wisper Bikes, said UK firms had been heavily discounting in recent years to try and attract new customers.

He said the latest move by the government, which he described as a "very strange decision", would bring a "flood" of cheaper Chinese imports to an already overstocked market.

"It's a very scary time for the industry right now, and this will cause a lot of trouble for a lot of companies," he said.

David's company designs its bikes in the UK, but manufactures them in Taiwan and Portugal.

He said he had already been contacted by Chinese bike manufacturers offering very low prices for their products.

"They've overstocked too, and they now see the UK as a place to dump their bikes," he said, adding that he may now consider focusing solely on fold up e-bikes.

"I think the government are thinking 'Let's give e-bikes a boost' but this has been badly thought-through by people who don't understand the industry," he said.

The Bicycle Association, which represents firms who make and sell standard and fold up bikes, said it was helping its members to respond to the new rules.

"This is a significant decision and it may take some time for the implications for the UK cycle industry and its supply chains to become clear," a spokesman said.

"We have for example already requested official clarification of the precise definition which HMRC will be using to identify 'folding e-bikes', which are still subject to these measures."

What is an e-bike?

Electric bikes - or 'e-bikes' - are an increasingly popular way to get around for hundreds of thousands of people in the UK.

The broad term 'e-bike' is commonly used for any electric-powered bike, but it can actually refer to very different types of equipment which are covered by different laws.

When most people think of an e-bike, they picture what is essentially a normal push bicycle with a small chargeable motor fitted to make it easier for the user to turn the pedals.

But there are also far more powerful electric-powered bikes on the market which are sometimes lumped in with e-bikes - for example, some models can hit 60mph and are designed for off-road riding in rugged terrain.

[Read more here.](#)