

Trouble on two wheels

There has been a considerable increase in the ownership of electric scooters. Not only are there more e-scooters around, but they are getting faster, and are frequently seen in towns and cities across the UK, including here in Woking.

If these were all ridden by sensible people, wearing helmets for their own safety, and abiding by the Highway Code, then we would probably not be too concerned. But many are ridden badly, some even dangerously, and without consideration for pedestrians. With school and colleges having opened their doors again, there will inevitably be an increase in usage.

Just to avoid any confusion, let me make a simple statement: it is an offence to ride a privately owned e-scooter on a public road, cycle lane, pavement or park. Yes, you read that right. Everyone you see riding an e-scooter in Woking is committing an offence and liable for a £300 fixed penalty notice and six points on their driving licence (if they have one).

Currently, privately owned e-scooters can only be ridden on private land. These e-scooters are classified as Personal Light Electric Vehicles (PLEVs), so they're treated as motor vehicles and are subject to all the same legal requirements, such as MOT, tax, licensing and specific construction. Because of this, and the fact they don't always have visible rear lights, number plates or signalling ability, they can't be used legally on public roads.

The only way an e-scooter can be on the public road is if it is hired from a government-approved rental scheme authorised by the local council. These hired e-scooters are insured, have front and rear lights, and the rider must wear a helmet and have a full or provisional licence. They are restricted to 15½mph and banned from pavements. Woking does not yet have an approved rental scheme.

Riders of e-scooters need to understand that their relative silence while on the move makes them more dangerous when ridden in crowded places. Many of the latest scooters can reach 30mph, which is a dangerous speed on pavements and around shopping centres.

What's more, you often see young riders transporting their friends on the back. All e-scooters – private or hired – can only transport one person at a time. It is an additional offence by the rider to have a passenger on the scooter and may result in additional fines.

Sensible owners of these e-scooters may well complain they are being victimised because the same laws do not apply to electric bikes, but I am certain that the law regarding e-scooters will soon be improved. This will probably involve extending many of the restrictions applied to hired e-scooters, such as minimum age requirements and speed limits. But until all these vehicles are ridden by sensible people, who are 16 or over and wear the appropriate safety equipment, the law stands.

If you know anyone with an e-scooter, please pass this information on. It will make life safer for everyone and could save them a lot of trouble.