

ZERO MOTORCYCLES LIGHTWEIGHT, QUICK, ALL-AMERICAN AND VERY "ELECTRIC"

Story and photos by Randall Bohl • www.randallbohl.com

Zero Motorcycles of Santa Cruz, California, is producing a lineup of electric motorcycles for Street, Dual Sport, Motocross and Trail riding. They are all lightweight, clean designs using aircraft-grade aluminum frames weighing only 18 pounds for the street and dual sport and 13 pounds for motocross and trail. As you can imagine, the lithium-ion array battery is the heaviest individual part of the bike. Yet this, located in place of your internal combustion engine, weighs only 95 pounds in the street and dual sport models and 46 pounds in the motocross/trail bikes. Total weights range from 273 pounds down to just 161 pounds. Operating cost: less than \$.01 per mile.

SMOOTH AND QUIET RIDES

We recently did a test ride on the Zero S street model when TJ, Bryan and Brock of Zero Motorcycles brought the lineup to Street Eagle Motorcycle Rentals in Scottsdale. Different from, but similar to a conventional motorcycle, we first note no clutch lever and no shift lever. We turn the key and wait just a moment while the engine control unit comes to life and the battery capacity and digital speedometer displays come up. Your engine is "on," but there is complete silence. As a safety feature, there is a kickstand switch like our bike at home and, similar to a starter button, at your right hand is the throttle on/off switch. Flip this and the throttle is "live."

The suspension feels stiff and we expect a jolt when we roll on the throttle, but instead it's a smooth application of power, as the throttle is a rheostat, and the brushed permanent magnet motor displays a ton of torque but sends absolutely no vibration through the handlebars—again, smooth is the operating word. Zero-to-50 goes past like nothing, as the major sound is the wind in your ears, and there is no RPM to watch or gear shift to make. We quickly forgot about the missing clutch and shift levers, until we wished to downshift coming to a yellow light at 40 mph. Being completely dependent on the brakes alone was very different. We came to appreciate the stiff front suspension, which did not nose over, and the front and rear disk brakes, which hauled the bike down to a firm stop quickly after we reached for the clutch and went for a gear out of habit. This didn't happen a second time.

We rode the Zero S along with TJ while he rode

the Zero DS (dual sport), on city streets. The bike handled well when we ran it up to 50-plus. Top speed for the Zero S is 67 mph. You can relax, lean and turn this thing with two fingers on the bars. Again, smooth.

It turns out you can get in trouble on a quiet electric as quickly as on a loud Harley—the Zero is not stealth to radar. Earlier in the morning, TJ had taken one of the bikes out for a little test ride and was promptly welcomed to town by a speeding ticket. We won't quote the number, but it was just short of felony speeding.

FRUGAL AND GREEN

The guys at Zero didn't push it, which was a relief to us because we already consider our regular rider "green" at 45 mpg. They're here to sell motorcycles to riders, and the degree to which these are environmentally correct is a bonus. One such bonus is that you can take the Zero X out trail riding and not scare the wildlife or irritate hikers and mountain bikers.

This brings up a design difference on the off-road bikes: engineers on these two models applied their own mountain-biking experience to put the rear brake lever on the left handle bar, freeing your feet completely.

There are also federal and state tax incentives—check those out for current info.

All four models use external chargers, which can be 110 or 220 volts AC. The range on the Zero S and DS is 50 miles. Recharge time from empty is 2 hours to 80% and less 4 hours to full. Range on the Zero MX and X is 40 miles with a full recharge time of less than 2 hours.

At the aforementioned \$.01 per mile to recharge, the Zero S or DS make very economical daily commuters. The lithium-ion battery arrays come with a full two-year warranty and eight-year pro-rating.

DEAR SANTA

Why do we want a Zero S for Christmas? Summer nights in Arizona. Call us soft, but we don't like to ride at over 105 degrees Fahrenheit. We like to night ride, and here's our polite side. The neighbors have a problem with "noise pollution," namely a motorcycle rolling out in the middle of the night when the temps dip below 100. Odd how they have normal sleep patterns? The Zero S will be perfect for sneaking out and laying down 50 miles around the city, returning home guilt free. ■



All the Zero electric bikes are mono-shock with chain drive. An exhaust tube is for an electric motor cooling fan.

There's no tach, just speed and battery gauge. The speedo includes redundant needle and digital; we found ourselves reading the digital.

Top to bottom right: the Zero S Electric Motorcycle for the street lists for \$9,995, as does the Zero DS dual sport. The Zero X dirt bike lists for just \$7,495 (or \$9,295 for the Extreme version), and the Zero MX motocross bike for \$8,295 (\$9,950 for the Extreme).

Zero Motorcycles
1 Victor Square, Scotts Valley CA 95066
www.zeromotorcycles.com • 888-786-9376

Street Eagle Motorcycle Rentals
9419 E. San Salvador - Suite 106-B
Scottsdale AZ 85258
www.streeteagle.com • 480-391-9959



Zero DS lead photo (left), Zero X and Zero MX photos: © Zero Motorcycles, Inc.