

Electric motorcycles flood Havana amid diesel shortages

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People gather on their electric scooters to spend the late afternoon showing off stunts and racing in Havana, Cuba, Friday, July 15, 2022. Cuba has been flooded in recent years with “motorinas”, as these electric scooters are called on the island, a fad for many, but also a solution to the transportation problems and fuel shortages that overwhelm the Caribbean nation. Credit: AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa

The young people come and go on their electric motorcycles at this highway outside Cuba's capital where they perform stunts and talk about their two-wheelers, which would be largely silent if it weren't for the music blasting from speakers.

Cuba has been flooded in recent years with "motorinas," as the [electric scooters](#) are called on the island, which have been promoted by the government as efficient alternatives amid extreme gas and diesel shortages, and as a solution to the country's transportation problems.

Authorities permitted their importation last decade—Cubans cannot import motorcycles with gasoline or [diesel engines](#)—and since then about 300,000 of them have circulated on the island, said Col. Mario Ríos Labrada, head of vehicle registry at the National Transit Directorate. In comparison there are an estimated 500,000 cars.

The motorcycles can cost between \$2,000 and \$5,000. Many originate in China and are imported to Cuba through Panama. Cuban officials say a locally made [electric motorcycle](#) called the "Minerva" is being produced at an old bicycle manufacturing warehouse in Villa Clara.

"There is an 'outbreak' of electric motorcycles, everyone likes them," said Ernesto José Salazar, 20, who works in a paint shop. "We got to meet up with 200 motorcycles, honking and listening to music."



A laptop reads the voltage of an electric scooter after it was used at a gathering in the capital for stunts and races in Cojimar, Cuba, Friday, July 15, 2022. Cuba has been flooded in recent years with “motorinas”, as these electric scooters are called on the island, a fad for many, but also a solution to the transportation problems and fuel shortages that overwhelm the Caribbean nation. Credit: AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa

Young riders organize through social networks and spend hours discussing the benefits of a battery or where to buy tires or find the best workshop.

"Fuel is a lost cause, you have to look for it and queue up, right now having an electric motorcycle here is life itself," said Alejandro Vasallo, 23.

Cuban drivers face shortages of fuel, especially diesel, which is also used to power the electricity generators that feed the nation's [power grid](#), which collapsed this summer. Oil shortages have been caused by difficulties in Venezuela—an ally and supplier of the island—and U.S. sanctions.

Electric scooter drivers recharge the batteries through normal power sockets and are out of luck when the supply goes down.

Authorities in Cuba promote electric motorcycles as energy efficient and as an alternative to a public transportation system plagued shortages of parts to repair broken down buses and a lack fuel.



Kiara stands on an electric scooter as people work on their electric scooters after

attending a gathering in the capital of stunts and races, outside her caretaker's home in Cojimar, Cuba, Friday, July 15, 2022. Cuba has been flooded in recent years with “motorinas”, as these electric scooters are called on the island, a fad for many, but also a solution to the transportation problems and fuel shortages that overwhelm the Caribbean nation. Credit: AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa



People watch a drag race between two electric scooterists at a late afternoon gathering of electric motorbike owners to show off stunts and races in Havana, Cuba, Friday, July 15, 2022. Cuba has been flooded in recent years with “motorinas”, as these electric scooters are called on the island, a fad for many, but also a solution to the transportation problems and fuel shortages that overwhelm the Caribbean nation. Credit: AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa



Kiera gets a foot rub at his home by his care taker as people work on their electric scooters after attending a gathering in the capital for stunts and races in Cojimar, Cuba, Friday, July 15, 2022. Cuba has been flooded in recent years with “motorinas”, as these electric scooters are called on the island, a fad for many, but also a solution to the transportation problems and fuel shortages that overwhelm the Caribbean nation. Credit: AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa



A youth arrives with this electric scooter to a roadside gathering to spend the late afternoon showing off stunts and racing in Havana, Cuba, Friday, July 15, 2022. Cuba has been flooded in recent years with “motorinas”, as these electric scooters are called on the island, a fad for many, but also a solution to the transportation problems and fuel shortages that overwhelm the Caribbean nation. Credit: AP Photo/Ramon Espinosa

"Electricity will always be cheaper than diesel fuel and gasoline, and in addition, electric motors are much more efficient than combustion engines, you can save up to 70% of the cost of fuel," Ramsés Montes Calzadilla, strategy director of the Ministry of Energy and Mines, said in an interview with news website Cubadebate.

Electric motorcycles are changing the [urban landscape](#) in Cuba and also

creating challenges: the batteries tend to catch fire and their relative silence accompanied by driver inexperience is causing [traffic accidents](#).

The latest figures available from the Fire Department indicated that in the first half of 2020 there were 263 fires from motorcycles with gel or lithium batteries, a notable increase compared to 208 for the entire year 2019.

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