Your Shortcut to E-Bikes and E-Scooters

They promise freedom and fun. They blur the line between toys and vehicles.And they've sparked big debates in cities around the world. This is your Squiz Kids Shortcut to E-Bikes and E-Scooters — the podcast where we dive into the who, what, when, where, why, and how of the big news stories. I'm Christie Kijurina.

And I'm Bryce Corbett.

Bryce... you're wearing a helmet today.

Mmm Hmm I'm researching e-bikes and e-scooters.

On the computer...

Yep

I've heard about being safe online... but aren't you taking it just a little bit too far?

Maybe. But have you tried figuring out the rules for e-bikes and e-scooters in Australia? Different states, different speeds, different roads. I thought I'd better protect my brain.

So this is... safety gear for internet research?

That — and I've just got a new e-bike. And before I take it anywhere, I want to make sure I actually understand what's allowed and what isn't.

Which is a very sensible place to start...

In today's Shortcut, we're riding back through WHERE e-bikes and e-scooters came from, unpacking WHY adults are so concerned about them, and exploring HOW people can use them safely. So grab your helmet and let's hit the bike path.

Listen carefully. There's a S'Quiz at the end.

WHERE

To understand why e-bikes and e-scooters are causing so much debate today, we need to head backwards before we move forwards — because these ideas are much older than they look.

So they didn't just pop up overnight?

Not at all. For more than a hundred years, inventors have been trying to create small electric vehicles for short trips — long before apps or smartphones existed.

Basically, people have always wanted an easier way to get around.

Exactly. But the modern scooter most people recognise today really took shape in the 1990s, when a Swiss inventor named Wim Ouboter designed a fold-up kick scooter to solve what's called the "last-mile problem".

That's the bit between getting off public transport and getting where you actually want to go.

Right. Wim later said he wanted a simple way to travel short distances — including a trip to a nearby sausage stand — without using a car.

So… modern scooters may or may not have been inspired by snacks.

Convenience, at least. And the idea caught on quickly. Kick scooters became hugely popular in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

But they still weren't electric.

Early electric versions existed, but they were heavy and impractical. The real turning point came in the 2010s, when lithium-ion batteries became lighter, cheaper, and much more powerful.

Which explains why e-scooters suddenly exploded in the 2010s rather than earlier. And speaking of "exploded"…

Yes — there are some important dangers we need to talk about. Especially when it comes to powerful batteries and how these vehicles are used.

Which might explain why adults are paying such close attention now and why there's so much concern.

WHY

So if e-bikes and e-scooters were designed to make getting around easier, why are adults so worried about them now?

Because, Christie, they're not just fun gadgets anymore. They're vehicles. Some can travel at speeds similar to cars on suburban streets. And when speed increases, so does risk.

Especially when they're mixing with pedestrians, bikes, and traffic. Emergency services across Australia say they're seeing more serious injuries linked to e-bikes and e-scooters — including broken bones, head injuries, and, in some cases, even deaths.

Which is hard to hear — but important to understand.

Exactly. This isn't about scaring anyone. It's about explaining why adults are paying attention. Children and teenagers don't always have the same judgement, reaction time, or experience as adults — especially in busy traffic.

Even if they feel confident. Confidence isn't the same as control. Another big concern is the technology powering these vehicles — lithium-ion batteries. The same kind used in phones and laptops.

Yes. Lithium batteries are brilliant because they store a lot of energy in a small space. That's what makes e-bikes and e-scooters light and powerful. But if something goes wrong, that energy can be released very quickly.

That's why most lithium battery fires don't happen while riding — they happen while charging. Especially if a battery is damaged, poorly made, charged with the wrong charger, or left charging overnight near flammable materials.

Which is why firefighters keep reminding people to charge them safely and never block exits. It's also why adults should be cautious about cheap or modified batteries. Changing a bike to make it go faster might seem clever — but it can make it much more dangerous.

And then there are some electric bikes that cause even more confusion.

Like Sur-Rons.

Like Sur-Rons. They look like bikes… but ride more like motorbikes.

Sur-Rons are powerful electric dirt bikes. In most parts of Australia, they're not legal to ride on public roads, footpaths, or bike paths unless they're registered and meet strict safety rules — and many of the models sold are designed for off-road use only.

So riding one on the street because it's quiet or electric doesn't make it legal.

Exactly. But videos online can make that kind of riding look normal or harmless — even when it isn't.

Which puts adults in a tricky position.

It does. Because keeping kids safe isn't always about doing what kids want. It's about understanding what a machine can do — and whether it belongs on a road, a path, or a track at all.

But e-bikes and e-scooters aren't a problem everywhere. In places like Copenhagen, where there are wide, protected bike lanes, e-bikes work really well. Riders have space, clear rules, and fewer conflicts with cars and pedestrians.

And in Singapore, the rules are strict and clearly enforced. On the other hand, some cities have struggled. Paris, for example, banned shared e-scooters after residents voted against them, saying they were too dangerous and cluttered footpaths.

So it’s not just about the vehicle…It’s about the roads, the rules, and how ready a city is for them. Which brings us to the big question… If e-bikes and e-scooters are here to stay, how can people use them safely?

HOW

So if e-bikes and e-scooters are here to stay, the big question is: how can people use them safely? Not just for themselves — but for everyone around them too…. And I guess the first thing to understand is that speed changes everything. The faster something moves, the longer it takes to stop, and the harder it is to react when something unexpected happens… Like a car door opening. Or a pedestrian stepping out.

Exactly. Or a pothole you didn’t see coming. That’s why helmets matter — not as a rule to tick off, but as protection for your brain if something goes wrong.

And not just wearing one — wearing one that fits properly and having the clips done up. It can't help you if it doesn't stay on your head.

Another big safety factor is visibility. Bright clothing, lights, and reflective gear help others see you — especially in low light or bad weather, because being seen can be just as important as seeing.

Riding location matters too. Footpaths can feel safer, but they’re often unpredictable. Pedestrians move suddenly, and not everyone expects a fast-moving vehicle beside them.

Which is why rules about where you can ride exist — even if they’re confusing.

That confusion is exactly why checking the rules where you live is so important. What’s allowed in one state or country might not be allowed in another, and adults play a big role here.

They do. Adults are responsible for choosing the right type of vehicle, making sure it’s legal, and setting boundaries around where and how it’s used.

Yes. Some electric bikes and scooters are simply not designed for kids or for public roads — no matter how fun they look online.

And then there’s battery safety. Lithium batteries should always be charged with the correct charger, in a clear space, and never left charging overnight. If a battery is damaged, it shouldn’t be used, and if something doesn’t seem right — it probably isn’t.

Safe riding isn’t about bravery or showing off. It’s about planning ahead, knowing your limits, and understanding that you’re sharing space with other people.

Which means thinking beyond just yourself. When e-bikes and e-scooters are used thoughtfully, with the right rules and the right infrastructure, they can be a great way to

get around. They work best when everyone — riders, adults, and cities — take responsibility and look out for each other.

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THE S'QUIZ

"This is the part of the podcast where you get to test how well you've been listening...

1. What problem was the fold-up scooter designed to help solve? Was it:

a) The last of us

b) The last frontier

c) The last mile

[c) The last mile]"

"2 What made e-bikes and e-scooters suddenly much more user friendly and popular in the 2010s?

[Lithium Batteries making them lighter and more powerful]"

"3.True or False - If a vehicle is quiet and electric, it's automatically legal for anyone to ride.

[False]"

That's all we have time for today. Thanks for joining us as we explored the who, what, how, where, when, and why of E-Bikes and E-Scooters.

Now get out there, and have a most excellent day!

Over and out.