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Police Clamp Down on Illegal E-Bikes in Birmingham

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Police in Birmingham have launched a crackdown on illegal electric bikes being used by fast food delivery riders, as part of a wider operation across the U.K. Over 7,000 arrests have been made nationwide in the past year, marking a 50 percent rise.

West Midlands Police were out on New Street during lunchtime, where groups of delivery riders were waiting for orders near restaurants and shops. Officers, including Police Constable Paige Gartlan, were looking for electric bikes modified to go faster than the legal limit.

“You can usually tell straight away,” said PC Gartlan. “The battery packs are often taped on, and the motor on the back wheel is much bigger than it should be.” She has been involved in similar operations before and was once hit by an illegal bike during a stop.

Real Public Safety Risk

Within an hour, police had already stopped several riders and removed four bikes, all used for food delivery. One of the bikes was tested and showed a top speed of over 50 kilometres per hour (km/h) The law only allows electric bikes to go up to (25km/h) when the motor is helping.

People nearby were watching as officers stopped riders. Sandra, who had just finished work, said she had almost been hit by one of the bikes before. “They’re dangerous,” she said. “It’s scary when they come speeding past. Someone’s going to get seriously hurt.”

It wasn’t just the police on patrol who were involved in the operation. Immigration officers were also involved. Matthew Foster, the lead officer for Immigration Enforcement in the West Midlands, confirmed that one man was found to be in the U.K. illegally. “He has been detained and will be removed,” he said.

The bikes taken by the police were loaded into a van and will be destroyed. One belonged to a rider named Demoz, still wearing his food delivery gear. He said he didn’t realise his new bike broke the law. “I thought it was legal,” he said. “I made a mistake, I’m sorry. I’ll try to do better.”

The issue has grown as more riders try to save time using faster bikes. Some change the software or remove the limiters so they can travel at much higher speeds. These changes make it illegal to ride bikes on public roads.

Deliveroo, Just Eat, and Uber Eats said they remind riders to follow safety rules and are working with the government to improve checks on who uses their platforms.

Police say this is part of a bigger effort to deal with rising problems caused by modified e-bikes. More checks like this are expected in towns and cities across the U.K. in the coming months.