

Italian E-Bike Market Gets Boost With Opening of FIVE Factory

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MILAN, Italy – According to the recently published ANCMA statistics, the Italian market is in line with the European trend – a decline in traditional bicycles sales (-2.6%) while the e-bike category shows strong growth (+120% compared to 2015).



"Italy is a country that often adapts slowly to certain trends, but the latest market statistic clearly show – we are now following the trend of other leading European cycling countries." – Photo Bike Europe

"The market statistics we have published refer to the product availability just as we have done in the past years," underlined Piero Nigrelli, Director of the Confindustria ANCMA Bicycle Department, at the presentation of the annual report. "We calculate the total market volume by adding the number of bicycles produced in Italy to the number of imported bicycles, minus the export volume."

E-MTB the leading segment

According to the market data published by ANCMA some 124,400 e-bikes were sold in 2016, while the number of imported e-bikes was 108,800 units (+148.9% compared to 2015). The import parameter, Nigrelli explained, is significant for the outlook of the market.

"It justifies the growth of e-bike market volume in 2016 but also reveals that it will be even bigger in 2017. In the fourth quarter of 2016 Italy imported 40,800 e-bikes, a number that is almost equal to the volume imported in the first nine months (60,000) of 2016. A clear indication that the sales increased a lot in 2016 but that much of what was imported is expected to sold in 2017."

Though the volumes are still small, the e-bike exports also show positive numbers (+135.3%): from 3,400 units in 2015 to 8,000 in 2016. The E-MTB is the leading segment representing more than a 50% of the total sales. Also in Italy e-bikes are mainly sold via the specialized dealers, since the large-scale retail trade or the big retail purchasing consortiums are still unable to provide adequate after sales service. Consequently, the average e-bike sales price hovers around €1200.

Changing habits

Will 2017 will be the e-bike year in Italy? Pier Francesco Caliarì, General Director of ANCMA, has little doubt. "Italy is a country that often adapts slowly to certain trends, but the latest market statistic clearly show – we are now following the trend of other leading European cycling countries, such as the Netherlands or Germany."

However, although market statistics indicate that he is right, Italy remains a country of motorists. According to the latest ISFORT report on Italian mobility (Italy's Institute on Education and Research on Transport) says that the number of cars on the road increased by 2.4% to 38 million units in the past three years. The motorization rate is set at 62.4 cars per 100 inhabitants, the highest level in Europe.

Road safety

An ANCMA survey in 2016 gave a good explanation of the issues faced by the Italians when they have to choose between using a bicycle or a car. Safety on the road, the risk of theft and the physical effort were often mentioned as the reason not to choose a bicycle for transportation. In this regard, the e-bike could be the solution. The support by the motor increases the sense of road safety while there wouldn't be any purpose to steal an e-bike after the owner removed the battery.

Nonetheless it is a fact that something is changing in Italy. Several political measures pursued in the past years have not stimulated the use of the bike. However, 2016 saw the launch of the '10 cycle paths' projects, a total investment which exceeded €360 million. This is something Italy has never seen before. The bike sharing data report also gives new hope. According to the National Sharing Mobility Observatory, this service is provided in 2015 in more than 184 small, medium and large cities, with more than 200,000 subscribers.

Milan and Turin are the two leading cities on this list. Milan, with its BikeMI project, saw a steady increase in subscribers (+29%) in 2016. The city has recently launched a call for free floating bikes. The three-year experiment will provide Milan with 12,000 shared bicycles, supplied by private companies, with no fixed parking stations. A GPS driven App will allow the users to find the closest bike, use it, and park it wherever they want.

E-Made in Italy

Another relevant issue ANCMA refers to in its report is the domestic production of e-bikes. In 2015 some 16,800 units were made in Italy. That volume increased to 23,600 in 2016. "Our market statistics registered a nice boom for our 'Made in Italy,'" said Nigrelli. "The Italian supply chain not only assembles e-bikes but also manufacturers components and motors."

FIVE (Italian Electric Vehicle Factory) is exemplary in this case. The company inaugurated its factory last May in Bologna and in addition to relocating production from China to Italy, it holds onto a 'green' philosophy. The whole plant is built according to the ZEB (Zero Emission Building) technology, with solar panels to cover the power supply for the entire factory. The whole project involved an investment of over €10 million and the factory will serve other companies, in addition to their own brands Italwin, Momodesign, and Wayel.

Tradition goes down

Just as in many other European countries, the sales volume of traditional bicycles declined last year by 2.6%. Production (-1.3%), as well as imports (-9.4%) and exports (-3.2%) decreased in 2016. It also shows Italians are changing their cycling habits and tending towards new bicycle categories. Less traditional bicycles also mean less components.

The ANCMA report shows a decline of 9.8% in exported parts compared with 2015. However, thanks to the 'e-bike effect', overall values of both import (+3.5%) and export (+4%) of complete bicycles increased. The trade balance of Italian exports is also positive, with + 76 million euros. "The 2016 market data confirms the big change that has started in the previous years: e-bikes are changing the way we ride," Corrado Capelli, president of Confindustria ANCMA commented. "We expect this trend to continue in 2017."

Non-profit organization Legambiente recently confirmed the positive scenery, by releasing the Italy's first Bikeconomy Data. 'A bi Ci', is the first report on the economic effects of the bike and cycling in the Italian cities. According to this study bikes generate a turnover of €6.2 billion a year. They also calculated that the use of the bicycle also contributes over a €1 billion in health savings per year. And while bike production remains an important element of the Italian bike economy, Italy's cycling tourism is rising and would represent a turnover of €2 billion a year.

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