

Crossing the Heart of Mongolia on Electric Bikes



By Susanne Brüs

The founders of the Pedelec Adventures project – journalist Susanne Brüs and expedition leader Ondra Veltrusky – have crossed breath-taking steppe and mountain scenery from the geographical center of Mongolia to the old capital Karakorum. The Berlin-based team truly put Bosch's most powerful propulsion system to the test: they rode speed pedelecs up to 45 km/h from German brands on roads of any kind. Even where there were no roads at all. Traveling in an entirely self-sufficient way, the adventurers charged their bike batteries and other technical devices with solar trailers. With up to 50kg of baggage, river crossings and steep upward climbs were a real challenge. The bikes proved their strength ever again—also when racing against horses.

Hills and valleys, heat and hail were all part of Tour de Mongolia! We rode a brand-new cross bike from Kreidler and a touring bike from riese and müller which were both equipped with Bosch's most powerful pedelec system. With extra 350-500 watts for a support up to 45 km/h, we traveled down all kinds of pathways, straight across meadows and fields of stone, through brooks and mountainous territory and through marshes and sand. Flooded paths after heavy thunderstorms were just as much a part of the scenery as dusty roads on dry days. We navigated with a map and compass and took advice from natives time and time again, even though we usually could only communicate with our hands and feet.

Our equipment traveled along with us in panniers on two trailers. Loaded up with clothing for any weather, camping equipment, water, food, cameras and other technical equipment, spare parts and replacement batteries, each of us had about 50 kg of baggage. The all-terrain one-wheel trailers from tout terrain served as our "mules" and mobile charging stations. They were specially equipped with swiveling solar panels for this trip by ecom21. With the panels always tilted towards the sun, we were able to cover



almost our entire energy requirements from the sun during the entire tour – despite frequent rain clouds.

The drive systems, bikes, trailers and charging devices withstood every challenge without any major breakdowns. With a traveling speed of up to 30 km/h on good flat paths, we quickly became accustomed to the extra-watts of e-kit! What seemed to be so easy to do on our own efforts, quickly turned out to be a strenuous and sweaty endeavor, as soon as the battery was empty or the engine shut off. Time and time again, we were astonished by how smoothly we could master difficult routes with all our baggage and some practice. With a normal bike, for example, we would have avoided a steep incline of over 1000 meters with the same speed transmission. Here, we really drove the powerful pedelecs to their limits, not to mention ourselves.

Besides offering the toughest of all Tour de Mongolia test courses, the region around the old capital of Karakorum had much more to offer: the Erdene Zuu monastery which was built in 1586. The striking monastery walls once surrounded 60 to 100 temples, of which only three survived the Stalinist purges. Even though the first Buddhist monastery in Mongolia is nowadays only a shadow of what it was during its golden age, the historic site still captivates visitors from all over the world. However, on the day of our visit we don't know who caught more attention, Erdene Zuu or our vehicles!

During the entire tour we were surrounded by Mongolians who were curious to learn more about our project. Luckily, the typical deal did not require any words and was easily negotiated: a pedelec in exchange for a horse or motorcycle. And they all came back with a smile! It was also an unforgettable

experience when we zoomed up a mountain pass face-to-face with Mongolian horsemen. We could easily keep up if the horses just trotted, but when they started galloping, we indeed lacked a few watts to keep pace! Either way, sprints like this were a lot of fun!

Apart from “racing”, you quickly learn to slow down in Mongolia and let autarkic life flow at its own pace. This included visits to gers (the wooden yurts used by Nomads) in order to gain mutual trust and celebrate together. While Mongolian tea is served to greet guests, no long encounter ends without a bowl of airag (fermented horse milk) being passed around. Immersing ourselves in rural Mongolian life was a wonderful experience with many facets and unique stories to tell.

More about the tour at www.tour-de-mongolia.com **CHINA-E-VEHICLE**

