

TRANSPORTATION

JOYRIDE OF SHAME

I hate E-SCOOTERS, the supposed future of mobility—but I just can't quit 'em

By Steven Leckart

● I've never understood guilty pleasures. If you catch me head-bobbing to Taylor Swift's "Shake It Off," I feel no remorse. I have never, ever felt guilty for liking anything—until now.

Last summer, I reluctantly downloaded an app and rode an electric scooter for the first time. I say "reluctantly" because nobody looks even remotely cool on an e-scooter. Even Elon Musk, a goober who seemingly didn't smoke weed until age 47, said the e-scooter "lacks dignity." Just saying the word *e-scooter* out loud makes me cringe. But the first time a friend and I went bunny-hopping off curbs and slaloming steep streets at 15 mph, we giggled like Beavis and Butt-head as several passersby snickered at us. I can't blame them.

I live in Los Angeles, a few miles from where Bird was founded in 2017. Since then, the company has dispensed thousands of scooters that have been ridden at least 10 million times in 100 cities. (You pay a flat fee of one dollar, plus 15 cents per minute.) And rival companies and ride-sharing apps like Lyft are invading, especially around L. A. In my neighborhood, these things are everywhere. Outside a coffee shop, a dozen of them will be lined up in a row. On a quiet residential block, an errant scooter will be strewn arbitrarily on someone's front lawn, or ditched in the street, making it impossible to park a car. (I always park the scooter sensibly, be-

PLAGUE OF SCOOTERS
Breaking down the latest urban transportation craze



Instagram followers for @bird: **73.9k**

Instagram followers for @birdgraveyard: **70.3k**



Portion of San Francisco fleet that was vandalized after two weeks:

30 percent



Original valuation:

\$4 billion

Revised valuation:

\$2 billion to \$3 billion

cause I'm not an inconsiderate heathen.) Certain people probably shouldn't be allowed to ride them; it's been estimated that accidents involving e-scooters are responsible for at least 1,000 ER visits every month.

Regulation can't be far off. Some want to ban e-scooters altogether. Others are transferring their vitriol to the scooters themselves. On Instagram, @birdgraveyard posts clips of e-scooters being smashed and chucked off a seven-story parking garage. Turns out these Birds can't fly.

I totally understand the hatred as much as I appreciate the appeal. Today, I ride e-scooters mostly to save time. Whether I'm grabbing my afternoon Americano or running late to a meeting, I can now get there much faster. Unlike a bicycle, an e-scooter doesn't require a lock—or special parking. And unlike an expensive electric skateboard, you don't have to buy one. Would I rather own a 1968 Triumph? Of course. But I'm a 30-something dad who has never revved a motorcycle. Plus, my scooter habit costs me only a couple bucks at a time. Now I can invest all the savings in a full-face helmet so nobody will recognize me. ☒

