

And suddenly the search for a parking space is so much easier

More and more models are coming onto the market; smaller companies in particular are discovering the as an operating vehicle. But even a few large companies are rethinking.



The German Aerospace Center is testing the potential of s for commercial traffic. © DLR

In April Andreas Kiehlmeier got his E-Loadbike. Since then, the medical technician in Augsburg has been using it for almost all his working trips. And it works out well, because most of his customers are just one to three kilometers away from his office and warehouse in Augsburg's industrial park. But even for longer distances into the city centre, Kiehlmeier almost exclusively uses the bicycle.

This makes him one of the pioneers in the industry. Smaller companies in particular are currently testing Cargobikes as climate-friendly and space-saving company vehicles. Operators of large vehicle fleets often still hesitate to buy bicycles. The problem with vehicle replacement is that there is no such thing as a Cargobike as a universal car or Sprinter replacement. Load wheels must fit exactly to the intended purpose and the needs of their target group.

But now there are more and more manufacturers of load wheels, they are experiencing a real revival. Until the Second World War, transport bikes such as the Long John from Copenhagen with its large loading area between the handlebars and the front wheel were part of the cityscape of European and American cities. Dealers brought their purchases to customers' homes and craftsmen transported their tools. This changed with the car-friendly conversion of the city centres. But since there were load wheels with electric drive, they became more popular again. With support, 100 kilograms of train load can be comfortably driven through the city. Five years

ago, around two dozen companies in Europe manufactured load bikes, but today the figure is about twice as high.

Small manufacturers established companies and start-ups called Ono or Citkar bring new models onto the market every year. With large loading areas in front of the handlebars, boxes as high as people in the rear or sometimes even a driver's cab as weather protection.

Before craftswomen or fleet managers actually buy a load wheel, however, many parameters have to fit, says Sascha Auer. He is sales manager at the Sortimo vehicle fitter. The Bavarian company has been developing and building interior fittings for working vehicles for almost 50 years. Since 2016 Sortimo has also had a load wheel on offer.

Sympathy bonus for the

In conversations with his customers, Auer repeatedly states: "For many, a bicycle means extra work. Since there isn't as much space in the transport boxes as there is in the sprinter, craftsmen must tailor their tools exactly to the tour for the coming day, he says. This costs time and requires good planning.

Sanitary engineer Kiehlmeier is not deterred by this. Until now, he had to turn around first to exchange the load wheel for his transporter. A large construction vacuum cleaner did not fit into his Cargobike box. "You need a little courage to fill the gap."

But the load wheel is well received by his customers. They like the fact that it sustainably protects the climate and requires little space in the city, says Kiehlmeier. Some would have commissioned him especially for his bike. Because they wanted to support it. In any case, the bike is more economical: "I'm much faster."

Comparative test of cars and s

The aspect of saving time is also relevant for Johannes Gruber. In the "I relieve cities" project at the Institute for Transport Research at the German Aerospace Center (DLR), the geographer is investigating the potential of load wheels for commercial transport. Over a period of three years, DLR, supported by the Federal Environment Ministry, lends 150 s to companies and public enterprises for three months at a time. More than 700 participants have already taken advantage of the offer.

The scientists have already evaluated the experiences of around 400 companies. 63 percent of them are small companies with up to nine employees. And show their experiences: For distances of up to three kilometres, s and cars reach their destination almost simultaneously. If the distances are longer, the car is faster. However, even on journeys of up to 20 kilometers, half the female cyclists arrive only two to ten minutes later than the car. In a traffic jam or on a traffic-calmed route, the bend quickly shifts in favour of the bicycle. Then 40 percent of the journeys are faster than the car.

"The Cargobike would perform even better if the real times were measured," says Gruber. He means the entire journey from door to door. Because the time taken to find a parking space and the time taken to walk to the car or bicycle were not taken into account.

However, the test participants were disturbed by the infrastructure of the cities. They complain about poor cycle paths and often consider their situation in urban traffic to be dangerous. Vehicle supplier Auer also observes that his customers in cities with a better cycling infrastructure are more likely to buy freight bikes than in cities with poor cycle paths.

All in all, the participants in the project were very willing to make the change. More than 98 percent of the journeys would again be made on a load bike. This is in line with Kiehlmeier's experience.

24-hour repair service

And to keep the number of load wheel failures to a minimum, manufacturers are professionalizing their service. Whether small start-ups or established Cargobike companies - almost all now offer their own maintenance contracts or work together with bicycle shops. Anyone who uses their load bike professionally must be able to rely on it riding reliably and being repaired quickly if necessary. The Bremen-based start-up Rytle, for example, offers its customers a worldwide 24-hour service. Rytle is an offshoot of the vehicle manufacturer Krone, which builds bodies for trucks, ginaliners and agricultural machinery. Together with the logistics company UPS, Rytle has developed the Movr, a load wheel with driver's cab, interchangeable container and a so-called minihub, a mobile storage box for several transport boxes.

If one of the 200 Movr, which now roll through Germany, Asia and America, breaks down, the customers use the logistics of the parent company Krone. "Downtime is the enemy of logistics," says Rytle Managing Director Ingo Lübs. The spare parts for the Movr wheels are now in stock next to huge forage harvesters and semi-trailer trailers. In the event of damage, they are sent around the world immediately. The installation is carried out by authorised dealers on site - for load wheels and combine harvesters.