

# Operation Gears

Published on 28 November 2025 Written by Superintendent Phil Mullally and Sergeant Carly Slinger, Merseyside

Practice note: a targeted response to illegal electric vehicle crime

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Like many police forces across the UK, Merseyside Police has experienced a rise in criminal activity linked to electric bikes and electric motorcycles (e-bikes).

Between January and March 2025, incidents of anti-social behaviour (ASB) increased from 112 to 146, with concerning links to serious organised crime (SOC), robbery and violence. Notably, there were 30 robbery offences related to e-bikes in May 2025, 75% of which were knife-enabled.

In response, we began developing a new unified, intelligence-led and community-focused operation to address the illegal and anti-social use of two-wheeled vehicles.

## Background

While illegal vehicle use is a national issue, benchmarking revealed that each force faces unique challenges. Geography and crime patterns vary, making a one-size-fits-all strategy ineffective.

We reviewed our response to incidents involving these vehicles and found that our previous strategy, Operation Brookdale, was outdated. It focused largely on scrambler bikes and did not reflect the broader scope of vehicle modifications or their use in serious crime.

Merseyside Police are increasingly encountering illegally modified bikes, such as battery packs taped or zip-wired to pedal cycles, breaching electrically assisted pedal cycle (EAPC) regulations. Many are fitted with lithium batteries, posing fire risks because of unregulated imports. The twist-and-go function is often enabled, removing the need to pedal and rendering the bike illegal under **EAPC standards**.

Public perception was also a concern. Insight data showed that some reports of scrambler-related ASB did not result in visible action. We knew we had to rebuild trust and improve intelligence gathering.

This led to the launch of Operation Gears, a modernised initiative designed to tackle SOC, robbery and ASB linked to illegal two-wheeled vehicles. These vehicles include electric motorcycles, scooters and e-bikes that fall outside EAPC regulations.

## Intelligence-led improvements

We updated call scripts when initial contact was made, with input from a roads policing unit (RPU) tactical advisor to ensure that accurate detail was obtained for pursuit decisions and more detailed incident reporting. This includes:

- bike appearance and type (EAPC, scrambler and so on)
- presence of engine or battery
- vehicle registration mark (VRM) and rider description
- riding behaviour (pedalling or not)
- frequency and location of sightings

The new #OpGears tag system populates call scripts with precise incident data, enabling a targeted, task-focused policing capability. It also enables keyword searches across incidents and crimes, helping us to analyse patterns and scale. The re-design of our briefing system, Corvus, provides updated intelligence on important locations, offenders and vehicles.

## Internal launch

To ensure operational readiness, Operation Gears was launched internally several weeks before the public announcement. A dedicated resource hub on our intranet gave officers time to:

- review Road Traffic Act 1988 (RTA) legislation and seizure powers
- understand EAPC regulations and Operation Gears expectations
- access PowerPoint briefings and guidance on stop searches involving persons and bikes, hosted on Microsoft 365

This was further promoted by frontline command teams in daily briefings. We began implementing operational activity with confidence.

Force-wide internal messaging helped to identify and address gaps, particularly around seizure powers, while strand management support teams cascaded important updates.

Training is ongoing, adapting to emerging trends, gaps and enforcement messaging. We also use Bike Register, a national property registration scheme, to check and register bikes, ensuring they are not stolen.

Officers now have greater confidence in legislation and enforcement, contributing to a record 163 illegal two-wheeled vehicles seized in August 2025 alone. This was 181% and 159% higher than in August 2024 and August 2023, respectively, bringing the 2025 total to 789.

## Community engagement

Schools are a main focus. Safer schools officers deliver annual education packages, staff training and newsletters to parents. A recent inspection uncovered six illegally modified bikes, which were returned to parents with further education, a practice that we will continue.

Our media strategy highlights enforcement outcomes and uses video content to show real-world impact, building public awareness and support.

To ensure a robust and multi-faceted approach, all efforts align with our '4P plan':

- prevention
- pursuit
- protection
- preparation

## Progress so far

Since launching Operation Gears, we have seen measurable impact:

- increase in vehicle seizures – a 105% increase between June and August 2025, in comparison to the same time-period in 2024, from 198 to 406 seizures
- reduced serious violence and knife-enabled crime – a continual decline across Merseyside's 29 hot spot areas, with 25 fewer offences recorded so far in this financial year, a 16.8% reduction
- decrease in robbery – June 2025 recorded the lowest level of personal robbery in Merseyside in over seven years
- improved intelligence gathering and data analysis – a 450% increase in intelligence submissions with logs tagged #OpGears
- greater officer confidence in enforcement and stop checks of bikes, including pedal, EAPC (legal and illegal) – in July 2025, officers registered 368 legal bikes on Bike Register, conducted 577 stop checks for stolen property, and seized 137 bikes identified as illegal
- improved recognition of hot spot identification – this is because of updated call scripts enhancing our knowledge, during one targeted operation in Liverpool, 20 illegal vehicles were seized
- public engagement – to date, our campaign has reached six million people, with over 700k impressions on social media

## The road ahead

We are proud of the progress made, but Operation Gears is just beginning. Its success is driven by officer dedication, public engagement and partner support. This includes:

- Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service
- local authorities
- the police and crime commissioner
- the Merseyside Road Safety Partnership

Our focus remains on disrupting illegal vehicle use and reducing road-related harm, while tackling ASB and SOC. Through visible policing, assertive enforcement and meaningful engagement, we are building public confidence and denying criminals access to our roads and public spaces.

Importantly, Operation Gears is not about penalising responsible riders. We fully support the safe and legal use of e-bikes and other two-wheeled vehicles. By targeting unlawful activity, we aim to make communities safer for law-abiding users.

- This article was peer reviewed by T/Police Sergeant Matthew Orton, Leicestershire Police

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