VanMoof 2.0: a new hope

“Impressed,” is the word I keep coming back to after meeting with the new leadership of VanMoof, a company that helped popularize electric bikes before abruptly declaring bankruptcy this summer.

I was impressed by Elliot Wertheimer and Nick Fry’s symbiotic relationship, impressed by their zeal to keep existing VanMoof riders on the road, and impressed by their plan to gradually restart the VanMoof machine and expand into more areas of e-mobility.

I met with Wertheimer and his corporate chaperone Fry in London last week to discuss VanMoof’s future, at a time when some 200,000 riders have been left without components or service centers for their sophisticated e-bikes built with proprietary parts.

This isn’t another Kodak situation, I’m happy to report, where the VanMoof brand would be squeezed until it’s all but worthless. “It’s super important to us to retain what VanMoof was,” says Wertheimer. “So product engineering, product design, tech development is still in-house, fully. We have not outsourced it and we will not outsource any of that.”

Still, as impressive as everything sounds, it’s all talk for now. The first real test of the new company will begin soon.

The launch of VanMoof 2.0 involves a staggered rollout of replacement parts to retailers with in-house repair shops, a resumption of e-bike sales, and a new VanMoof-branded e-scooter in the first half of 2024… in that order, if all goes as planned. Key European markets are the initial focus.

The US remains a priority for VanMoof but timings there are less certain. The VanMoof legal entity in the US never declared bankruptcy and the operations there are undergoing restructuring alongside creditors. Wertheimer's VanMoof is the legal owner of the US entity, but it's being treated as a one-off compared to the rest of the company with its own unique timelines for a 2.0 launch.

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a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin [&>a]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-white”>Parts and service centers are coming soon

“Keeping riders on the road is top priority,” says Wertheimer, not once, but five times during our two-plus hours together. And that means two things: the availability of spare parts and the launch of a new network of retailers — aka, certified bike shops — that can also service VanMoof e-bikes.

So, in Q1, and starting sooner rather than later, VanMoof will be launching a new parts and retailer network with an initial emphasis on meeting the majority of riders where they live. That means spinning-up a new network of third-party certified bike shops located in big cities across the Netherlands, Germany, and the UK, initially.

“We are looking at improving some key parts and components that needed to be improved, not only just from a reliability perspective, but also from the standpoint of mechanics,” says Wertheimer. The team is focused on making VanMoof e-bikes easier to service in order to avoid the long wait times that have historically plagued VanMoof riders. Wertheimer says the goal is, “to make sure that a workshop can fix your bike in 20 minutes, not three hours.”

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The majority of VanMoof e-bikes on the road are S3 and X3 models, so those parts are the priority. But VanMoof’s bikes are made from hundreds of custom parts. “I think there are 400 SKUs,” says Wertheimer. “We’re focusing on the most important ones, about 20 to 30. And then we’re going to ramp up progressively on the rest.” VanMoof batteries and e-shifters are on that priority list, as the company continues to push out firmware updates to fix any known bugs.

Parts will only be available via the new retailer network for the foreseeable future. And while existing VanMoof e-bike warranties have gone *poof* with the bankruptcy, Wertheimer says “we’re going to supply those parts at preferential rates to retailers,” and launch its own warranty program at the same time. But if you want your VanMoof e-bike serviced, you have to go to one of the certified bike shops, assuming one exists close by, which can then analyze the problem and recommend a solution. DIY solutions might come later.

“We do not want to be in servicing anymore,” says Wertheimer. “I think they tried with a lot of great intentions, but it is too difficult to do it for yourself.”

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a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin dark:[&>a:hover]:shadow-highlight-franklin [&>a]:shadow-underline-black dark:[&>a]:shadow-underline-white”>VanMoof Series 1 scooter

Fry says that VanMoof’s unexpected bankruptcy accelerated Lavoie’s plans to branch out into e-bikes. This sudden refocusing on e-bikes is causing the retail launch of the original Lavoie Series 1 scooter to be pushed back about six months.

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In fact, the Series 1 scooter, developed by Lavoie and McLaren Applied will be rebranded VanMoof, with plans to launch it just after VanMoof e-bikes go back on sale. The Series 1 was supposed to launch in November, but is now being reworked in new colors, materials, and finishes. The scooter is also adopting the VanMoof app and UX / UI for its built-in display. That work has pushed the retail target to sometime in Q2.

I was able to test ride an old engineering prototype of the Lavoie-branded Series 1. I’m not a scooter guy (they aren’t legal where I live) but I can understand the last-mile value proposition of a folding scooter that can be carried onto a train or bus for free, or loaded into the back of a car. The future of urban travel is multi-modal, and e-bikes and e-

scooters will both have their place inside the VanMoof app.

The folding mechanism on the Series 1 was developed by McLaren Applied and it’s something to behold. First it obviates the need for a kickstand, and allows the scooter to quickly collapse into a rather compact and portable package. The Series 1 will also inherit VanMoof staples like turn-by-turn navigation and anti-theft tech.

Does this mean we can expect a folding VanMoof e-bike in the future? “I hope so one day, but it’s not something we’re actively discussing,” said Wertheimer.