

Cycling

Advice for Beginners

As the saying goes, once you've learnt to ride a bike, you'll never forget. The next step is to feel confident; our quick guide below will help but a bit of training can be invaluable. When you're confident about what you're doing, you get a lot more pleasure out of it.

Types of Cycling

There are many reasons to go cycling: different journey purposes and different personal motivations for making that journey by bike. If you're new to cycling, this page will help you decide what kind of cycling you most want to do.

Transport

This is by far the most important kind of cycling: economically important because it takes people to work, the shops and to school, environmentally important because it replaces polluting means of transport, and important for health because it offers an ideal form of exercise that almost everyone can make part of their routine. Moderate exercise taken every day is far more beneficial than one big workout per week, so if you don't already cycle for all your local errands, think about it now. Transport cycling is mostly a matter of getting from A to B with minimum fuss. You shouldn't have to wear special clothes and though you don't really need a special bike, it helps if it's designed for low maintenance and to keep your clothes clean.

Commuting

Most people live less than 5 miles from their work and that's no problem, but if you have further to go a sportier touring, audax or even a racing bike and special cycling clothes may save more time than it takes to shower and change. Or maybe you can mix modes: use a train or bus for most of the distance and either keep a bike parked both ends or take a folding bike with you. Some people drive halfway to work and literally park and ride.

Shopping

This needs big panniers, a bike designed to carry them (i.e. city, trekking, or touring bike) and a change of habits. Shop more often and enjoy fresher food! A bike is easy to park so visit the shops on your homeward commute and it won't take extra time. You can even do the big weekly shop by bike: all you need is a trailer, or maybe a work bike.

School run

All the child seats, trailers and tandem adapters that make family cycling possible can also be used for the journey to school etc. Cycling is, of course, the only independent means of transport (other than walking) available to children. A kid's bike is freedom. But the more cycling you can do together as a family before those first solo flights from the nest, the safer they will be.

Recreation

Cycling is a great way to explore: fast enough to cover the ground and provide a continual change of scene, but slow enough to take it all in. On a bike you can smell the flowers, feel the breeze and stop wherever you want to take a closer look.

The moderate exertion of cycling sharpens experiences and sharing them is even better. Cycling is sociable, so go with friends and family. A ride lasting anything from an hour to all day does not need much preparation or special equipment. A map, a bottle, a snack, basic tools and a wind/waterproof will do. Use whatever sort of bike seems suitable for the surfaces you want to ride on and the speed you want to go. The same applies to the kind of cycling holiday comprising one-day excursions from a fixed base, or when there is motorised “support” to carry your luggage from place to place.

Fitness

Cycling for fitness and the thrill of speed is an increasingly popular recreation that borders upon racing and uses the same kind of bike or something similar. It’s essentially a road activity, with even mountain-bikers finding it useful to hone their speed and stamina on road. Reason being that on the open road there is nothing to stop you trying as hard as you can; and since tarmac has less drag, that effort is rewarded by more speed – encouraging you to try even harder! Any kind of bike with a reasonably rewarding road performance will do,

Off-road

For many people “off-road” means railway trails, towpaths and the like. They’re avoiding traffic not tarmac and an inferior surface is just a price worth paying for freedom from pollution and danger. If that’s your motivation you’ll generally keep to passably surfaced tracks within the capability of a hybrid, trekking or touring bike.

Real off-road riding definitely implies something more challenging. And if you want to get even further away from it all, into places where the only trail is rough and rocky a mountain-bike will be wanted.