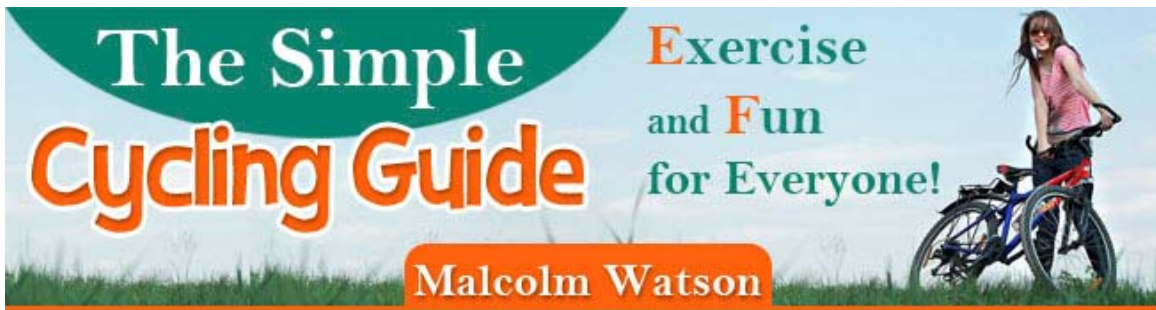


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About the Author

Malcolm Watson has enjoyed cycling for several years.

He is not surprised that it is becoming even more popular every year.

"I know a lot of people that have decided to get a bicycle who have probably not ridden one since they were children. There are also people who have started to ride the bikes which they have only used occasionally, getting them out of the basement!"

"I know the benefits which can come from regular exercise and cycling is one of the best types I know."

"A friend calls her bicycle her 'gym on wheels'. She says that almost everybody can afford it and it's easier to fit into a busy schedule than a gym membership or most other organized activities."

"A bicycle is very cheap to operate and can even save you money! Foot power is cheaper than horsepower and I have no parking problems even at the busiest times of the day."

Malcolm wrote this ebook to encourage more people to get back on their bike or to ride more often.

"I've included a lot of information based on experience of myself as well as the experiences of people around the world. I want to help people get the best out of their bicycling adventures."

"I've included some tips about riding in traffic and bad weather. There's also information about getting the right bike for each member of their family, why saving money is not always the best strategy and also how to save money in ways that they may not know."

"I'll point out the risks involved in cycling and how to reduce or avoid them."

"I've written this book just like I have talked to friends who wanted to get more enjoyment out of their riding. I hope they will be soon joining me and the thousands of other bicycle riders who get more enjoyment from every day on their bikes!"

Introduction

Whether you have been riding casually for some time or maybe have not ridden a bicycle since your school days, this book will help you to become a confident and capable rider.

I've covered the basics from choosing your bike to travelling on or with it.



I want more people to share my enthusiasm for riding bicycles. The best way I know to do that is to give you a lot of encouragement without ignoring the possible problems which many bike riders encounter.

When you have read this ebook, you will be better prepared to get a bike which will suit the type and amount of riding you plan to do and which will not make you uncomfortable or put you at risk through poor design.

An important consideration for many riders is riding with their children and helping them to become confident and careful riders themselves. So, I've given the best suggestions I could about that.

Not every suggestion will fit all readers but they will all be good starting points for the decisions which you need to make to get the best value from your investment of time and money.

I am grateful to people that have asked me questions about bicycles and riding. I have tried to cover the most common and also those which seem to cause most concern for people that are not regular riders.

Malcolm Watson

What to Wear

People ride their bicycles in almost every imaginable type of clothing.

Some cyclists wear the same or similar gear as professional riders because it is designed for the task and/or it looks cool.



The clothing you wear is a matter of choice but you should keep in mind that some clothing can keep you comfortable and some can help you be safer while you are riding.

Your budget, comfort, type and amount of riding and personal preferences are all important factors.

Loose clothing may catch on part of your bike or even a passing vehicle or something at the side of the road with dire results.

Whatever you wear should be comfortable and durable.

Clothing designed for racing includes:

Cycling Jackets

These vary in the material they are made from, according to whether you will mostly be riding in hot or cold weather. Some are also waterproof or will, at least, repel more water than most jackets.

The tail at the back of the jacket is usually a bit longer than regular jackets because the jacket will ride up when you are bent forward. This stops your back being exposed.

Some jackets have pockets at the back for essential items like your phone etc. Some riders fill these to excess which probably makes them more comfortable but looks very odd when they get off their bike.

Because the jackets need to be fairly close-fitting, some have loose sleeves to get some airflow to the riders' arms when they are riding. So, you need to carefully check that the jacket you buy will allow you to move and bend your arms sufficiently when you are riding.



An alternative is short-sleeved jackets which don't protect the entire length of your arms but don't cause any heat problems.

Another worthwhile investment is a vest with brightly colored safety stripes. This can be a life-saver. You can also get jackets which also have these stripes on them.

Bike Shorts

Bike riders wear special shorts, called "knicks", which have special padding in those areas which contact the bike seat when you are riding. The padding was originally made from chamois but all the padding now available is a synthetic substitute.

These shorts also have smooth seams to reduce or eliminate chafing.

Gloves

I believe that these are an essential item for all cyclists.

They will protect your hands from weather conditions.

In winter, you want a full glove which will protect your skin when you handle the cold metal frame. Some will have some absorbent material inside the gloves to draw sweat away from your hands and outside to wipe sweat from your forehead or dab a runny nose. Some gloves are waterproof to some extent.

In warmer conditions, many riders wear gloves that have no fingertips.

Gloves also reduce the amount of vibration your arms are subjected to.

Your gloves will, to some extent, protect you from injury.

When we fall, most people will throw out their hands to protect their head and body. Many cyclists have serious injuries to their hands.

Shoes

Your regular shoes would not suit regular use on your bicycle. They are not made to take the pressure of your feet on the pedals and the vibration from the road.

Whatever shoes you wear are likely to be stained by oil and other matter which is thrown up from the road.



So, you might want to buy shoes which are produced specifically for cycling.

If not, you should look for shoes with a flat, firm sole which will maximize the power transferred from your legs into the bicycle. Cushioning between your feet and the sole of the shoe may help to prevent any soreness developing.

Special forms of cycling such as mountain bike riding require special shoes and many cyclists use special types of pedals.

But, most casual cyclists can get a lot of the gear they use from other places apart from specialist cycle stores and they can be cheaper.

Just check that they are made to be as durable as the kit available from the specialists. A jacket which might fall apart in the rain on a long ride is false economy.

You should always carry some light gear which you can slip on if there is an unexpected rain shower. Make sure that anything you wear occasionally does not have any loose straps or wide cuffs which might catch in your bike's moving parts.

Back to School

There are three types of information and training which are essential for all inexperienced riders.

If you haven't ridden a bicycle for years or have only ridden on private property and other areas where there is little or no traffic, I suggest that you look for a course or perhaps a willing friend who rides regularly, for some advice before you venture to take your bike on the road.



Many cycle clubs and some government organizations have courses or refresher sessions for people that are planning to get back on a bike after some years only using powered transport. You also need to be aware of all rules and regulations affecting bikes and their riders in your area. A quick call to the local authorities or a bicycle club (or to their web site) will get you the information you need. If you visit a web site, check that the information is

current.

The third and possibly the most important part of the education process you need to go through, is learning about local conditions and hazards.

Your local club is the best source of current information based on the members' experiences. You could get some advice from a friend, but it's better to get as much reliable advice as possible, because that knowledge could save you from injury or worse.

Accessories add Safety and Comfort

As the popularity of cycling continues to grow, more and more accessories and adornments are being produced for both bikes and riders.

I'll focus on the most important ones and leave you to explore the huge (and expensive) range of other things at your leisure.

People dress in all sorts of gear and add an amazing variety of things to their clothing and their bikes when they ride. My focus is to only wear items which provide some comfort or safety for my riding.

Always carry identification with details of who needs to be contacted if you are injured or incapacitated. If you have a paper document, put it in a waterproof, sealed sleeve. Think about getting an I.D. bracelet, especially if you have any significant medical conditions, such as illness or allergies to particular drugs etc.

Personal Accessories

Helmet

The most important accessory, which many believe is an essential item for all bike riders and is legally required to be worn in many jurisdictions is a helmet.

The current situation in the U.S.A. is that different states have different rules. You can check what is currently required in each jurisdiction at this site <http://www.iihs.org/laws/HelmetUseCurrent.aspx>. You should check



the rules for any state you intend to visit as well as the one where you live.

There is apparently no law at the time of writing in the U.K. which requires bicyclists to wear helmets and there seems to be very strong opposition to the idea among bike riders. There is an ongoing discussion about this topic in the U.K., so readers

living in or visiting the U.K. should check with the authorities there.

In Australia, the law requires that all bike riders wear a helmet. All children are required to wear a helmet when riding or being carried on a bicycle.

Check with your doctor about very young children. They may be exempt if their necks have not developed enough strength to be able to support the helmet or if there is any other medical issue.

New Zealand law requires that all bike riders wear a helmet.

I wear a helmet because it supplies a degree of protection at relatively low cost. The effects of head injuries on people in car and bicycle accidents can be severe, but that decision is for you to make.

I suggest you look at a variety of helmets, don't just pick the most stylish or



expensive. There is some debate about whether a more expensive helmet always offers better protection.

But, you will probably not have the options to adjust a cheaper helmet to fit you as well as you might

with an expensive one. This can be important because I don't know any people whose helmets fitted them straight out of the box. You can understand that the helmet protects you best when it is properly fitted to prevent it moving around when in active use.

You need to ensure that any helmet you wear has sufficient allowance for proper airflow so that your head does not get too hot. That would be likely to cause you to lose concentration and could have other serious and lasting effects.

Most are just a plastic shell with a foam lining. Get the best quality that you can. You need to choose a helmet which fits you comfortably or you may start finding reasons not to wear it.

This applies even more to helmets you get for your children.

All helmets should be inspected regularly.

Manufacturers recommend that a helmet which has not been in a fall or other incident should still be replaced about every three years.

But, if you find that:

- Any of the straps are frayed or loose
- Any fittings are close to failing
- The foam is losing its firmness or bits are flaking away

- And especially if there is any sign of cracking or other wear in the helmet - Get a new one before your next ride.

Visors

Visors can help to deflect small objects, which may be thrown up by your bike, from hitting your eyes. But, some of them may also reduce the field of vision you have while you are riding.

If you become involved in competitive cycling events, you will probably be required to buy and use a specified type of helmet or not allowed to compete, possibly for insurance reasons as well as your safety.

Gloves

Gloves are usually considered an accessory but I regard them as essential. More riders get hand injuries than head injuries. While most are minor, the effects of a serious injury to your hands can affect much more than just your riding.

Bike Accessories

Bike Bags

There are a great variety of bags available. The most common used to be the traditional utility bag which many cyclists still have attached under the back of their saddle. This was just big enough to carry a spare tire tube, a couple of small tools (usually a screwdriver and a spanner), and some chewing gum. Larger bags are made to be attached in front of the handlebars.

Racks

There are a wide range of racks and other supports which can be attached to bicycles so that you can carry things.

It is best to use something which has been designed for the job rather than adapt something to the bicycle. The rule is to make sure that the rack and the item(s) on it are safely secured and that neither have any chance of interfering with your ability to ride safely to your destination.

Panniers (for bicycles) are two roomy bags which are connected to each other at the back near the top by two thick cords or a flat flexible strip.

The bags are put on either side of the rack over the bicycle's back wheel and the bags hang down on either side of the wheel, which is protected from the bags by the struts which connect the rack to the center of the back wheel.

The term came from France where it was used for two baskets or bags which were similarly connected and carried by both people (over their shoulders) and animals.

Panniers are good when you need to carry a reasonable amount of gear but should be packed carefully so that you can find any particular item fairly quickly. You might put anything which might be needed during your cycling session in a smaller bag on top of everything else in one of the panniers.

Before you ride with your panniers for the first time, get on your bike and ride a few feet to ensure that your heels will not connect with the panniers while you are riding.

Backpacks are popular with some cyclists. They're great if you have just a few items, but you should try to keep the weight less than you might put in it if you were just hiking around.

When you are carrying a heavy pack while cycling, your back will soon get very sweaty because of the weight and the exertion of your riding.

The next option is to fasten a backpack or some other sort of pack to a rack at the back of your bicycle.

This gets the weight off your body and may give you better freedom of movement. Just make sure that the pack and its closures are well secured or you may see your stuff strewn all over the road if you take a sharp corner.

I mentioned a trailer when I was explaining some ways to carry very young children. There are some well-made trailers designed for fixing to the back of some bicycles.

Always check your insurance if you have any when you add something like that.

Please do some practice riding with your trailer attached in a quiet area before taking it on a real trip.

Essential Equipment for Your Bicycle

Pump

You can get hand-held pumps, some which have a base-plate which rests on the ground and even devices which use carbon dioxide gas from a one-shot cylinder to inflate your bike tire.



The hand pumps usually have some sort of fitting so they can be attached to the frame of your bike.

You may want to improve or replace the type of fitting to make the connection between bike and pump more secure. Also, make sure that you can easily remove the pump from the bike when you need to use it and that you can securely attach it again or you may have to discard your pump and buy a new one when you get home.

You may feel that the gas powered type of pump is worth the cost if you are riding in severe conditions and you want to minimize the time and effort required to fix your type. But, remember that each cartridge works only once, so you may want to carry a spare cartridge and maybe a hand-operated pump as well.

There are actually two types of floor pumps. One is upright and you operate the handle at the top with your hands.

The other type is operated with your foot. These are designed for cars but can be adapted for use with bicycles.

The pumps which stand on the floor are usually larger than some cyclists want to carry with them. But, if you do have one with you, it will make inflating a tire after repair much quicker than using a regular hand-operated pump.

Always pump your tires to the pressure printed on the tire itself unless you are advised to use a different pressure in particular circumstances by someone with appropriate experience.

Noise Makers

These may be bells or horns. There are a great variety and some are more practical than others. You pay your money and take your choice.

Although horns are probably more likely to be heard in traffic, bells often have a more pleasant tone and can be less likely to aggravate the driver(s) whose attention you are trying to attract.

I suggest that you get something which will suit the conditions where you are mostly riding, make sure that the device is firmly attached to the handlebars and try to ride so well that you rarely, if ever, need to use it.

Lights

Your bicycle is probably equipped with lights and they may be adequate for your needs.

But, you should check whether the particular conditions which you will be riding in may require that you upgrade or add to what is provided as the standard lighting kit.

The rapid improvement in the quality and power of L.E.D. lights make them worthy of consideration at least as accessories to boost the visibility of your bike and also help you to see more of the area you are traveling through.

You should carry spare batteries and globes for your lights, also any screwdrivers or other tools which are needed when making replacements. Make sure you have the correct size and type of screwdriver.

Some people prefer to use lights which have cases which snap-apart so they don't have to fiddle with a screwdriver in dim conditions. But, ensure that they are strongly made. If you break the casing when you are trying to replace a bulb or battery, the light will probably be useless.

A small light at the front of your helmet can be useful in some conditions. Don't forget to dim it or turn it off when you are stopped and talking to other people or they will be dazzled.

As well as good quality lighting, wearing a vest or jacket with reflective tape is a simple, low cost idea which may increase your safety.

Add reflective tape to wheel rims, your helmet and any other areas which can be seen by other road users who approach you from the side.

First Aid Kit

A First Aid kit is good insurance. And, if you are going to do a lot of riding, I strongly suggest that you consider doing a recognized first-aid course.

I am not being pessimistic – it's just sensible to be prepared and capable of helping other riders as well as yourself with some injuries.

Too many people leave it to "luck" or "other people". Sometimes, neither are around when you, or a family member or friend, might really need them.

Don't try to carry a lot of anything. You should just carry enough of each item for the trip you are on and check what needs replacing as soon as possible after finishing the trip.

The container should be durable, watertight and clearly marked with the words, "First Aid" or an appropriate symbol. Use a bag or a box but make sure that the contents are protected from damage. All containers should, preferably be plastic, where possible, to reduce any risk of broken glass in your medicine kit. All medicines and medical preparations should be kept in their original containers. If they are glass, put each bottle or jar in a strong plastic outer container.

Other items in the kit should be in a separate sealable bag to keep them clean.

I always put a list of the contents on a piece of card which is sealed in a laminating pouch and attached to the underside of the flap of my first aid bag. That makes it easy for anyone who might use the bag to know if it contains what they are looking for and is also a handy reminder when you check if anything from your kit needs refilling or replacing.

You can add to or alter the list of items which I suggest so that it suits your requirements and takes account of the particular risks and conditions you could meet in the areas where you travel.

Small scissors. Sterile tweezers. Disposable latex gloves. Antiseptic. Antibacterial hand sanitizer. Moist wipes. Aspirin/Tylenol/Advil.

Wide, waterproof tape to fix the ends of bandages without using safety pins. Put a separate pair of scissors or a cutter with the tape so that the scissors in the kit are kept for use on people, not tape and other possibly soiled items. Sterile bandages and adhesive dressings (include some which are claimed to be waterproof). Sterile gauze in a roll and also pads.

Always check before giving any sort of medicine. People may have allergies or certain conditions which could be affected by some preparations. Don't think that something is safe for everyone because you have used it for years.

Utility Kit

There are a number of items which you should carry with you whenever you are riding for a distance:

- ✓ A flashlight with batteries and globes
- ✓ A personal alarm
- ✓ A pocket knife (make sure the blades and other accessories really work)
- ✓ A mirror for checking appearance and maybe for signaling in an emergency.

You should always carry toiletries like deodorant, sunscreen (all year around) and lip balm.

You should not share any eye drops or anything which is applied the eyes.

The More the Merrier.... and Safer!

You should be able to find a club or other organization for bicycle riders in your area very easily. I have included some addresses and web links in the resources section near the end of this ebook for National organizations and other organizations.

The cost of membership for your local group is likely to be a bargain.



You will get the advantage of advice from experienced riders which can save you a lot of time and mistakes as well as money.

They will also probably have set up deals with local or even national suppliers of gear for bikes.

One of the most popular and valuable benefits is the group activities which will help you to improve your skills in bike riding and also can lead to development of lasting friendships as well.

Some clubs arrange group bookings for state or national events which can be a wonderful way to get more valuable knowledge, have a great time and make more friends at the same time.

Bicycle clubs are family oriented and a great way to meet new people and learn from other members about the best places to ride and what risks there may be in other areas that you are not familiar with.

Even when there are no organized group rides, you can often connect with other members to join together for your own rides.

Some riders put off the idea of joining a club because they feel they could not keep up in the group rides or participate in the competitive events.

When they realize that the clubs usually have members whose skill levels range from pro to rank beginner, they often decide to give it a try.

The clubs will ensure that they can ride with people at a similar level of experience and fitness while they get enthusiastic encouragement and advice which will help them to achieve their personal bicycling goals more easily than they ever would trying to do it on their own.

When you start to improve (it probably won't take as long as you think!), you will be able to help people who have less experience just like you were helped when you started.

Some people think that many clubs are made up of groups that don't welcome other people but you will find that cyclists are generally easy to get to know. And, like all clubs, any help you can offer with the administration or running of the Club will be highly appreciated. That's a great way to get to know more of the members in a very short time.

As well as advice from individual members, you may find that the Club in your area has its own instructors who will help inexperienced cyclists and those who are taking up cycling again after some time, to learn the best ways to become confident riders in varied conditions and keep themselves and others safe on the road or elsewhere.

The clubs know and use the most scenic and safest routes around their area. By taking part in their tours, you will start to collect information about places which you and your family might want to ride at other times.

The cost of Club membership is usually an investment which repays each member for years afterward.

Riding with Your Children

Riding with your children on your bike is something many parents love to do. There are obvious risks which probably can't be eliminated but the following tips may help you to minimize them.

My first suggestion is that no baby or child should be carried on a bike at all, at least until they are of an age that they have developed strength in their neck to support a strong helmet.

Any child on a bicycle is subject to the stresses which all bike riders experience every time they ride, including those caused by braking and bumps.

For that reason, I suggest that you always ask the advice of your medical professional about whether it would be okay to carry your small child on your bike. They have a better knowledge of your child's stage of development than you would, however closely you watch the child.

These can be unexpectedly severe and also, of course, are likely to upset or even frighten a child who has not experienced them before without being cuddled and protected at the time.

That said, companies do supply equipment for attaching to bicycles to carry younger children.

Some are well-padded but only the trailer would be any protection in the event of even a minor contact with a car or another bike.

There are two main types of child seats which can be attached to your bike, provided the bike has the correct frame and is strong enough.

The smaller seat fits in front of you and is only suitable for a small child weighing no more than about 25 pounds. That may be okay for a child up to three years of age.

This has advantages in that you can see the child and they can see you.

But, of course, that can be a distraction when you are riding.

The other seat is larger, fits behind you and can carry a larger child with a weight limit of about fifty pounds. Many five year old children might be okay in this.

The disadvantages are that you can't see what the child is doing and it cannot see you.

Some people ride with a child in front of them and another at their back. This can work but needs more careful practice to ensure your riding is not negatively affected.

Using either type of basket means that you cannot have a carrier for your possessions (not even a backpack), because the child's basket is there.

Most parents don't mind because they have their most valuable possession with them, but it does mean you will have to make some arrangement for the child's needs somewhere.

The third option is a trailer which attaches to the back of your cycle.

The trailer is enclosed with a transparent weather-proof cover (it has holes for ventilation).

This is pulled behind the bike. The child is out of your sight and they cannot see or contact you.

The trailer is stronger than the baskets and is intended for road use. It has some protection for the child.

Trailers usually have some extra space. Some have fittings to hold two small children in helmets and space for a couple of toys or other small items.

Some children like the enclosed trailer and watch the passing traffic or just play with their toy. Others may become agitated because of the lack of contact with you and noises from the traffic rushing past them.

With each of these options, you will need some practice to get your balance right and adapt your riding style.

Be especially careful when you are securing the child into the seat and taking them out after the ride. They will be excited and moving about and you will

need your full concentration to ensure that they don't fall and neither does your bicycle onto them!

I hope this discussion has given you some points to consider.

Get Your Kids Riding



Many parents give their children a tricycle and then give them a bicycle with training wheels when they judge they have the physical skills to handle it. But, some other parents will start with the trainer-equipped bicycle instead. If that is their first bike, they may need more supervision than with the tricycle.

When you feel it is time to get your child their first bicycle, there are a number of points to keep in mind.

An adult may keep riding the bike they buy for several years. They don't need to change to a different bicycle unless they want something with more features, perhaps because they want to do some type of riding which their current bike is not really suited for.

But, a child will not use their first bike for more than a couple of years because they grow too big.

That means the parent might be willing to buy a bike for their child which does not have the highest level of quality and durability as long as they were convinced it was safe to ride and likely to last beyond the time their child would be likely to use it. That is a fair and reasonable attitude.

This section will give you some suggestions about what you need to check to give you peace of mind and your child a great experience with their first bicycle.

I suggest that you get the bike from a specialist bicycle shop rather than a chain store or wholesale outlet.

Although the others will probably have lower prices, they won't have the expertise to guide you in your purchase.

A child needs their first bike fitted to them and you need to know that you can get service for it if there is anything wrong. If you find there is

something wrong with the bike, you may get your money back or just another bike from the same batch.



Most bike shops will not service bikes from the other types of outlets because many are made to a price which does not allow for fitting of any sort of adjustments to them.

When you are looking at a bike which your child likes, get them to sit on it. They need to be able to comfortably lift their leg over the frame without stretching.

Their feet should rest comfortably on the ground on either side with about a two inch gap between their clothing and the top of the frame of the bike.

If they have to stretch their arms to reach and use the handlebars, the gap is too long. They would have some difficulty controlling the bike on the road.

Teaching Your Child to Ride

This can be a wonderful experience for any child and probably even more so for a parent.

But, it needs for each of them to be as patient as possible. I suggest that you try to make the experience as comfortable and stress-free as possible for your child.

If you keep your focus on their experience, while still carefully monitoring what's going on, you are almost guaranteed a good time and good memories which you will all enjoy recalling in later years.

Don't stress too much about potential injury or mistakes and hold back on any criticism.

Be supportive and understanding, so your child's confidence grows as their ability improves.

Set the child up on a level grass or other soft surface. Make sure that they can straddle their bicycle and have both feet flat on the ground.

After you hold the bike while they get into position for their first attempt, let them do it with you at least a couple of feet away. You will be close enough to assist if they tip over but they will get their balance faster if you aren't grimly holding on to some part of the bike.

If you have a gentle slope available, let them coast down it with their feet on the pedals and stop gently at the bottom.

Then, ask them to try some straight riding.

Then, get them to practice braking.

Then, start them doing some turns.

Be patient and, if you must worry, keep it to yourself.

Fitting Your Bike

Part of selecting the best bike for you is to check how well you fit to the one you want to get.



It is very important that you aren't too cramped and that you don't have to stretch to reach and operate the pedals and the handlebars.

But, each rider will put different values on each of the factors.

When the rider is only on the bike for a few minutes and riding for speed, they will be prepared to compromise on comfort to gain a sleeker shape that has less wind resistance.

Any experienced rider will have seen some people who have developed lasting pain in knees or other parts through riding their bike without it being properly adjusted for them.

Always keep in mind that most people are not exactly symmetrical. For instance, their arms may vary slightly in length.

This means that a bike which is set up for one person will not be exactly right for someone else. It also means that there may be noticeable differences between the posture of two different riders although there are basic points which I'll cover in this section.

That won't matter if someone uses another person's bike occasionally. But, if they take it over for their regular use, it should be fully checked and adjusted so that they avoid the risk of injury in the future.

It's a good idea to check the adjustment has not loosened over time or you may develop problems later on.

It is a good idea for you to have help from another bike rider when you are checking a bike before you buy or making adjustments to your new bike after the purchase.

All bicycle shops will provide some level of fitting to match you to the bikes they have in stock at the time of purchase.

They will also do this service after you have bought your bike from them but they will almost always charge for it unless you ask for the help during the purchase. Some shops will use fairly sophisticated systems while others will depend on their experience and judgment.

Always check these factors on any bicycle which you are thinking of buying.

The first check you need to make with a bike which has a horizontal bar is to check that you can raise one leg over the horizontal bar and put your foot down flat on the other side, without stretching or contacting the bar.

When you have one foot flat on the ground on each side of the bike, there should be at least two inches clearance between your clothing and the bar.

The setting of the seat on your bike is critical for your comfort and safety whenever you are riding.

If the seat is badly aligned, you will tend to slide when you are powering along which is uncomfortable and potentially dangerous.

When you are seated on the bike and one pedal is at the bottom of its stroke, your leg should be almost completely straight. Otherwise, you will not be delivering all the power you can.

A seat which is incorrectly positioned can cause strain and bruising. It will also increase the pressure in your limbs which will make you more tired more quickly.

If you start to feel any kind of pain when riding or after you get off your bike, don't ignore it. It could be an early warning. Try to work out what is causing it so that you avoid a bad outcome later on.

Looking after your hands should be a no-brainer.

They are vital in so many tasks we have to do every day.

Your hands are under pressure much of the time you are riding because they are gripping the handlebars and absorbing the thumps and bumps which come from the road.

Your gloves will help to protect your hands and keep them warm.

It's also important to keep your elbows slightly bent. Your arms will be under much greater stress if you start to keep your arms straight and inflexible.

This is likely to cause ongoing problems and reduce the efficiency of your riding style.

Some pain may not have a physical cause but be related to stress.

That's why I am including the next short section.

Cycling for Enjoyment

One of the important advantages of riding is that it lets you have a mental break from whatever you do during the rest of your week.



Try to focus on the enjoyment of your riding and put personal or business anxieties aside while you enjoy your cycling.

This will ensure that you are more alert and get the maximum benefit from the time you have on your bike.

Sometimes, it can feel great to ride by yourself,

but riding with others who share your enjoyment of riding is even better.

Some of the best times can be when you are with your partner or your family. These sessions can bring you enjoyment and also valuable memories which you can all share for years to come.

You can also take part in group cycling with members of your cycling club.

Although many people think that cycling is something which is mostly done in good weather, there are many cyclists that enjoy riding in colder conditions.

In some locations, they don't have a lot of choice!

Riding Against the Elements

You may take a while to get used to riding in poor weather, but you should be able to get a more experienced rider to give you some suggestions and perhaps even ride with you to suggest ways that you might improve how you handle the conditions.



It is important to get some experience in varied, less than ideal conditions because it is inevitable that you will encounter them from time to time and often with little warning.

Always carry at least a thin waterproof jacket and warm gloves all year around, just in case you need them.

In very cold conditions, it's better to wear several layers of clothing rather than fewer bulky items. You can easily remove a thin jacket and store it on your bike.

Wind

Many riders say that strong winds can be a significant problem for them.

It is not just the effort of riding against the force of the wind when it comes at you from the front or the side.

The wind will quickly cause you to become cold. This can be a serious problem. Your clothing needs to be thin so that your movements are not restricted but you also need some materials which will stop the wind cutting straight through you.

Rain

Rain has several drawbacks for riders. Only experience and good concentration will help you through it. But, these tips will also help.

Start from the top. You can use a snug-fitting, waterproof cap with a peak to keep your head warm and dry. The peak will reduce the amount of rain which collects on your glasses or visor when you are waiting for a car to move or lights to change.

With that, you can use a thin, waterproof jacket to cover your trunk.

An alternative could be a jacket with a hood. This could be thin if you wear a warm layer under it or thicker so it provides the warmth.

Either jacket should come well down your back so that no rain gets in under your clothing when you are leaning forward as you ride.

Some jackets have hoods with panels on the sides which can be joined to protect the lower half of your face. You would need to check how well these fitted you in the conditions. You would need to take care that they didn't obscure your field of view too much or make it harder to move your arms to the full extent you needed.

Then, you could add a pair of light splash-proof pants. Get a quality pair that will be comfortable when you are riding. Check that they will fold up well so you can stow them in your bag when the rain stops.

Make sure that the seams are not too prominent or rough, or they may cause you as much discomfort as the rain would if you didn't have the pants with you.

I think mud-guards should be standard equipment because they make a great difference to your level of comfort when it is raining. Some form of a rack at the back of your bike will provide some protection but the mudguards are a wise investment. I don't know anyone that has put them on their bike and ever taken them off again permanently.

A cover for your bike's chain is also a good idea.

These are often sold as accessories. I suppose that shops prefer it that way because it is an extra sale and they can charge more for them and, sometimes, for fitting them as well.

Check your brake pads regularly, especially when rain is frequent. The grit seems to cause more wear more quickly when it is assisted by rain to get into the inner parts of your bike.

Defensive Tactics

Always listen closely when more experienced riders talk about tactics. Sometimes, they are focused on racing which is beyond the scope of this book. The tactics I discuss in this chapter are survival tactics.

Don't wear sunglasses because they reduce the light reaching your eyes and will make it harder for you to see. Carry bike glasses with yellow or clear lenses which will assist you to pick out the important details on the road you are traveling.

Help yourself and the other road users, wear bright clothing or put on a vest with bright reflective stripes.

A strong red light on the rear of your bike is essential. One that flashes is even better because the "moving" light focuses the eyes of the driver or rider behind you without dazzling them.

Make sure that you have good power for your lights. Batteries are okay but some will fade quickly. So will LED lights.

If possible, use a quality recharging system for regular lamps on your bike. Use as many lights as you can on the sides as well as the front and back lights.

It's not for decoration, it's to get you where you're going safely.

Riding in the wet needs practice. Special attention needs to be paid to turning corners and coping with traffic.

Always apply your brakes smoothly, especially in the rain or when the rain is still lying on the road.

Get someone to watch and comment on your technique. Some clubs will have sessions to help less experienced members learn from the "veterans." Try to attend and be prepared for criticism – it could save you from serious injury.

One hazard which can be encountered any time on the road, but which is more dangerous when there has been rain is oil.

Be alert for shiny patches on the road which appear to be reflecting stripes like a rainbow. You can reduce the number of oil patches which you have to

go through by riding nearer to the side of the lane you are in when it is safe to do so, because cars will mostly drop their oil in the center of a lane.



Other hazards include metal fittings such as manhole covers and tram tracks. Even painted lines on the road may become more slippery after some rain.

Don't ride through puddles when you don't have to. There can be holes in the road itself which are hidden by the pool of water. A car will slide through and keep going but many bike wheels are damaged by pot holes of that kind and many cyclists are too.

Give yourself more time to complete a bike journey when it is raining. If someone is waiting for you, let them know you are taking the safer course and slowing down rather than

trying to get through the rain as quickly as possible.

Remember, that many of the motorists will have the same idea!

Happy Trails!

I hope that my ebook is useful to you and that all your riding adventures are enjoyable and help you build lasting, lively memories.

Maybe we will meet on a road somewhere some day!

Malcolm Watson

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