

# Re: Cycling

Excalibur's John Andrews discusses the details of the sport.

cont'd from front cover

determine how much you want to spend and take some time to shop around. Often different shops carry the same bikes with price differences as much as three figures. Find a good shop with an experienced staff who will not try to talk you into something you don't want. Explain to the salesperson what type of riding you do and see what they offer. Prices are not concrete and a good bike shop should allow for some haggling, or throw in some accessories free of charge.

When looking for a bicycle, do not rule out buying a used bicycle. Being extra careful, you can occasionally find a used top of the line racing bike for half or even less than half of the original price.

The fit of the bike is of paramount importance; if the bicycle does not fit, the rider will be uncomfortable and subsequently lose interest. The general rule of thumb for the frame size is that, while you are straddling the bike, the top tube should be about two inches from your groin, four for a mountain bike. The saddle height is the most often neglected adjustment. For a proper fit, your leg should be almost fully extended, with just a slight bend at the knee. The fore-aft position of the saddle should be determined by dropping a plumb line from the outside of your knee, just behind the kneecap, to the floor. With a proper fore-aft position, the plumb line should intersect with the pedal axle. For men, the saddle should be parallel to the ground and for women it should be tilted slightly upward.

To determine your handlebar's stem length, sit on the bike with your hands on the drops. Your arms should be slightly bent and your back relatively flat. If the stem length is correct the bars should obstruct the front hub from view. The same is true for mountain bikes.

Clothing for cycling has gone wild in the past five years. Cyclists used to ride in wool shorts, jerseys and tights. With the invention of lycra, not only are cloths more comfortable but they make you look and feel fast. Because of cycling, lycra clothing is now being used in many sports and even every day fashion.

Although shorts with a chamois in them are very important, the most necessary piece of personal equipment are the shoes. Cycling shoes have a stiff, unbendable sole usually made of nylon. This ensures that your energy is efficiently transmitted to the pedals without the waste caused by having your foot bend below the plane of the pedal. Foot retention is equally important and takes some getting used to, although once mastered, is indispensable. Toe clips and straps are still available but the new wave in cycling is the clipless pedal. The most popular brand of clipless pedals are made by LOOK, and operate much like a ski binding, in that you step into them. To release, you just twist your foot to one side and snap out. These pedals are very safe as they provide hands free operation and, in the event of a crash, they release upon impact. This is not the case with toe clips and

straps and many cyclists have been injured by flying through the air still attached to their bikes, only to have the bicycle break their fall.

Riding in traffic is the one thing that most people fear. In the past five years, there has been an improvement in driver awareness, but care is still needed both behind the

wheel and on the bike. The most important thing to remember is to be aware of what is going on around you. As a cyclist, you are a vehicle and actually have more right to the road than automobiles. Most cyclists make the mistake of riding too close to the curb. This invites cars to pass in your lane, often resulting in the

rider being forced into the curb. To ride safely, ride about one metre from the curb. This makes you more visible and forces cars to leave your lane to pass you safely. This also allows the cyclist to ride a straight and predictable line and avoid debris, potholes and sewer grates. Riding in traffic takes experience but, with

time, one can feel comfortable. Ride defensively and remember that a two-ton car can do more damage to you than you to it; ride intelligently. The Ontario Cycling Association (OCA) is a provincially funded organization which is responsible for the administration of all facets of cycling. Membership is \$30 and offers an

informative handbook, newsletters and dates for tours and races. It also offers the cyclist third party insurance up to \$1 million, no matter where you ride. The OCA is located at 1220 Sheppard Avenue East, in Willowdale, or can be reached at 495-4141.

Racing a bicycle in Ontario

requires a licence. This can be purchased through the OCA only after attending a Learn to Race Clinic. A licence costs an additional \$50, on top of the OCA membership. The OCA also stipulates that a racer must belong to an OCA affiliated club. There are about 120 clubs in Ontario and about 35 of them in the Metro

Toronto area. They range in size from about 100 members (in the Scarborough Cycling Club) to the four members of a club called Sportbilly.

Paul Jurbala, former executive director of the OCA, said the number of licensed racers in the province has grown from about 400 in 1979 to well over 1,000 in 1989. While Jurbala does not expect to see a huge influx of racers, the sport is growing steadily.

Racing a bicycle is not for everyone. Most people believe that anyone can ride a bike, so racing can't be that difficult. This could not be further from the truth. Racing is extremely tough, both physically and mentally. Imagine racing along at 50km/hr with 120 other riders, each riding about 20cm apart. If someone makes a mistake, numerous cyclists will crash. Races range in distance between 60 and 200km and that means anywhere from one and a half to five torturous hours in the saddle.

Crashes do occur but are usually not too serious. The average injuries are skin abrasions known as "road rash" or "pizza" and bruised egos. Occasionally, someone will break a collar bone or dislocate a shoulder, but this doesn't happen too often.

In 1988, at the Niagara Grape and Wine Festival race, a junior named Jamie Kerr lost control of his bike on a rain soaked corner, went through a store window and consequently bled to death. This was a shock to the racing community and was an uncommon freak accident, but it illustrates the potential risks and bravery it takes to race.

One of the greatest myths of cycling is why racers shave their legs. This has nothing to do with aerodynamics and is, for the most part, hygienic. Shaved legs are easier to massage and, in the event of a crash, it is easier to clean the abrasions and lessens the risk of infection. It is also less painful to remove bandages from a hairless leg. In this respect, shaved legs are somewhat akin to wearing a motorcycle helmet, in that you don't need it until you crash. Shaved legs are also something of a status symbol in that you generally would not shave your legs unless you race, or ride an awful lot.

Jurbala said the overall OCA membership has stayed around 3,600 since 1986 and that only hardcore racers and tourists keep a regular membership. The real place to measure the growth of cycling is through the bicycle shop. Stores are making record sales with a strong consumer market based on upgrading equipment or staying with the latest fads in the sport.

Cycling is a fantastic sport whether you race or just ride around the block. It is a sport which anyone can participate in for the rest of their lives. The Ontario cycling community is friendly and has many veteran riders who are more than willing to share their colourful anecdotes and expertise with the new cyclist.

John Andrews has been riding for 13 years, is an NCCP coach and club president.

