



## *Choosing a Bike*

*Here are some tips to help you on your way when choosing a bike.*

### *Contents*

- Where should I buy my bike?
- Which bike is best for me?
- Choosing the right bike size
- Buying a helmet
- Emergency items
- Accessories

### *Where should I buy my bike?*

If you purchase a bike under \$500 you may find that parts wear out quite quickly. Your gears may not shift and your tires may puncture more frequently. At the other end of the spectrum a very expensive bike will have parts that will last longer, but when you do need to replace items, the parts will be more expensive. Department stores and warehouses can save you money, but the service is not usually as good as a bike shop.

Bike shops can:

- offer you large range of bikes at different prices,
- give you advice on a bike that will best meet your needs,
- swap parts around to make the bike suit you better,
- help you to fix any problems.

Many bikes shops can also:

- arrange regular group rides,
- run courses (riding skills, bike repair, touring advice),
- can give you free advice on places to ride (good local tracks, quiet roads),
- introduce to clubs or other people with similar interests,
- let you know about local and national events,
- help you to find apparel and cycling accessories.

Used bikes bought through classified ads or on the web can be a good deal, but there are dangers when buying second-hand. The bike might have been thrashed and could need expensive repairs. If you buy a second-hand bike that turns out to have been stolen, you could lose the bike and your money. It's not a good idea to buy a bike without seeing it and riding it first.

### *Which type of bike is best for me?*

#### Mostly Riding on Roads around Town

For riding on roads a 'city bike' costing \$500 - \$1200 is your best bet. City bikes can be fitted with racks and panniers (cycle bags). Riding with panniers rather than a back pack makes travelling around town much more pleasant. If you do want to attach panniers check that your bike wheels are going to be strong enough to carry added load (extra spokes and stronger rims). Riding with panniers can change the way your bike handles so take care. Generally panniers are water resistant, easy to put on and take off and come in a range of sizes that can easily fit groceries, parcels and other bits and pieces.

City bikes are also fine for doing weekend cycle touring. If you are planning to regularly do multi-day on and off road rides you might consider buying a touring bike.

### Mostly Riding Between Towns (Cycle Touring)

Touring bikes are specially designed to carry large loads very long distances. Touring bikes are heavy, but they are very reliable and have been designed to be very simple to fix. These bikes can be fitted with front and rear panniers and trailers that can fit your tent, cooking equipment, several days' worth of food and parts to repair your bike (spokes, chain links, tyres, tubes etc).

### Mostly Riding Off-Road Tracks and Unpaved Roads

If you'll be riding on rough tracks, choose a Mountain Bike. There are many different types of Mountain Bikes. Introductory 'sport' bikes start from \$800 - \$1500. These bikes will have front suspension, platform pedals and fat knobbier tyres. The frames are fairly durable as these bikes have been designed to handle rocky, sandy, muddy terrain.

Keen mountain bikers might pay anywhere between \$1500 - \$6000 for a bike with components that are lighter and of a higher quality. Mountain Bikes in this price range come in a wide range of styles (cross-country, trail, all-mountain, gravity and freeride). These bikes may have both front and rear suspension, hydraulic or mechanical disc brakes and clipless pedals\*.

\*Clipless pedals – sometimes called Clip-in – allow you to clip-in to these pedals with special shoes that bind your foot to the bike. The clip system results in about 30-40% more efficiency (less energy used), but takes a bit of practise to learn to use safely. It's quite a confusing name. Previously pedals had a cage that you clipped into. The first pedals that arrived without a cage were called 'clipless' and the name sort of stuck even though you clip-in to clipless pedals!

### Mostly Riding on Road for Fitness, Sport or Leisure

Road bikes start from \$500 and go up to \$12,000+. These bikes have light frames, v-brakes, drop handle bars and thin tyres. Thin tyres have less rolling resistance for faster travel, but they may puncture more frequently than the wider heavier tyre of a city bike.

If you are buying your first road bike try not to get talked into spending too much. \$1200 is a decent price for a first bike. Once you have been riding regularly for a year or two you'll have a pretty good idea of the bike candy that you want to drop big bucks on.

## ***Choosing the right size bike***

Check out the bike before you buy it, to make sure that it fits your body.

### Frame size

- There should be at least 12cm between your crotch and the cross bar when you straddle a mountain bike, and 3cm or more for a touring, city or racing bike.
- For maximum comfort and performance, your leg should be almost fully extended with the heel on the pedal while you're sitting on the seat. For children, don't be tempted to buy a bike to 'grow into' - seat height adjustment can accommodate some growth, but the frame has to fit from the word go.

### Seat position

To test the seat position, put the seat right down (most bikes have a quick release lever to do this) and check that you can just touch the ground when sitting on the seat. The seat can be raised (e.g. for growing kids), shifted forwards or changed angle, using a tool - either a spanner or an Allen key, depending on your bike.

### Handlebars

If the handlebars seem too far away, ask the bike shop to fit a shorter 'handlebar stem' (it can be changed back at a later date if needed). The handlebars can also be raised and lowered, but you might need extra washers to do so - ask for advice at a bike shop. Having the handlebars high makes the bike safer and more comfortable to ride. It's easier for you to see traffic, and for the traffic to see you.

### Pedals

Start off with standard platform pedals. When you're used to the bike you might want to add toe cages or clip-in pedals. These securely attach your feet to the pedals so you can pull up as well as push down on them. This results in more power, but riders can sometimes crash in the early stages when trying to unclip themselves.

## ***Buying a helmet***

Helmets cost between \$40 and \$600 and are not optional. By law you must wear a helmet, and for the best protection in a crash, it's crucial to choose the right size:

- The helmet should fit snugly, right around the head. Try several brands as some will fit better than others.
- The straps should be adjusted so that the helmet is level on the head and doesn't slide around. This doesn't simply mean tightening the straps until you can't breathe. It will take a few minutes and is time well spent. Ask an adult or a bike shop assistant to help.
- Many head injuries are to the forehead, so make sure that the helmet can't slide towards the back of the head.
- Helmets that have been hit in a crash must be replaced. Many brands offer discount replacements after a crash.
- 

## ***Emergency items***

### Phone

Take a phone card or cell phone out on your ride, just in case you need to phone home for help. This is especially important if you are riding rough off-road tracks

where accidents may happen. It might also pay to periodically check cell phone reception on your local rides. That way if something does go wrong you'll have some idea of where you can go to make an emergency call.

### Tools

To fix the most common of problems - a flat tyre - you'll need a pump, spare tube or puncture repair kit, and two or three tyre levers. Most mountain bikers also take a 'multi-tool' that has several Allen keys on it, and sometimes a screwdriver. Other common tools to take on a ride are a small adjustable spanner, a chain breaker, a roll of tough sticky tape (such as duct tape), a little bottle of oil, and a spoke spanner.

### Other items

If you are going more than a few km from home you might also like to consider carrying:

- A space blanket
- Basic first aid equipment
- A map
- An EFTPOS card and some cash
- An energy bar or some non-perishable food
- Extra water
- Sun cream
- A jacket or thermal pull-over

### Accessories

#### Locks

Cable locks can be easily cut through. Instead, choose a D lock and use it to attach your bike to something strong like a steel post. D locks cost between \$30 and \$180. Try to park your bike in places where there are lots of people. It's harder for someone to steal your bike in the main street than in an alley at the back of a building.

#### Gloves

Most cyclists wear gloves to protect their hands. There are different types of gloves for cycling rough tracks or riding to the shops. Gloves also help you to keep your hands in contact with the bike especially once you start to sweat. Gloves cost between \$20 and \$60.

#### Water bottles

Most bikes have a water bottle cage on the frame. Sports drinks from the shops usually fit into these holders well. You can also buy an additional water bottle cage from bike shops (most bikes can carry at least 2 bottles).

#### Windbreaker

Take a windbreaker on every long ride to protect yourself from cold and windy weather. These are made of lightweight nylon and can be packed down really small.

#### Cycle Computers

Cycle computers display distance and speed and can help you figure out where you are and how far you have to go. Some computers also display the time and your heart rate. To prevent a cycle computer from falling off during your ride, use a twisty tie to secure it to its mount on the handlebars.

## Apparel

You don't have to wear a tight lycra one piece racing suit when you ride. There is an ever growing range of urban bike wear that looks just as good walking around town as riding around.

Several New Zealand companies produce excellent urban apparel and more bike shops are starting to carry apparel for cyclists that don't want to look like a mobile billboard.

Look out for 'shy shorts' (3/4 length board shorts that have a padded seat) and loose fitting bike tops.