

New to Cycling? Or, getting back to Cycling?

Concerned about being able to keep up on group rides? Concerned about whether your bike and bike gear are suitable for club activities? Well, you're not alone! Our club is likely the right one for you. Many of our members shared these same concerns prior to getting into active group cycling. If you're about to buy a new bike before resuming riding, we suggest you come to one of our mid-week rides or one of our monthly meetings, visit several local bike shops, or call one of our club leadership members. It is important that you get the right equipment. If you're out of shape, we suggest you do some easy neighborhood rides on your own to get some conditioning and familiarity with riding in some light traffic, shifting, braking etc. Consider riding some of the Truckee River Bike Path if you live in the Reno-Sparks area, or on some quiet streets. Next, try doing something like the Franktown Loop (about eight miles) out of Bowers Mansion in Washoe Valley. If you have potential health limitations, consider discussing your plans with your family doctor. If you have been very inactive, do some extended fast walking or jogging to get in better tone.

For the next step, consider our mid-week rides. They are generally less demanding and often the pace is a bit slower. Our weekend rides generally require intermediate skills and conditioning. A few weekend rides are clearly directed toward beginners and are appropriate. Be sure to discuss your circumstance with the ride leader in advance if you have doubts or concerns.

Ask the experienced riders for advice and tips on riding technique, etiquette, shifting, etc... People love to share their knowledge and get a chance to be the "expert"!

Some equipment ideas.

About the Old One in the Garage

If you have an older bike in the garage, be certain to check out the tires and be sure they are not too dried out and cracked to be safe. Get them pumped up to the labeled pressures. Spin the wheels, check the brakes and shifters. If you have any problems, see one of our excellent local bike shops.

Before buying a new bike, you really need to think about your objectives and budget. Ten years ago, many bikes had as few as ten gears. Today, the better bikes have 30. You likely will need at least 21, and preferably 24 or more. Brakes have improved radically over this same period. The old ten-speed really won't be suitable for group riding or otherwise.

Several area businesses rent bikes and many bike shops have demos. Rental bike type options are somewhat limited. Try Truckee River Lodge or Bicycle Bananas in the Reno area. There are several others at Lake Tahoe North Shore. Ask shops for short term demo loans or test rides.

Types of Bikes

There are several distinctive different types of bikes. **Road bikes**, suitable only for street use. **Mountain bikes** are necessary for off road rides, however, they can be used on road rides. They require much more effort to maintain road ride speed since they are geared lower, have low pressure knobby tires, and sit you in an unfavorably upright position in the wind. **Touring bikes** are somewhat hybrid crosses of these types. They are often fitted to accept panniers, rear storage racks, etc... to carry your gear on tours across the country. The tires are somewhat larger and tolerate some gravel surfaces. They tend to seat the rider more upright and are less efficient in wind and at road ride high speeds. They are ideal for their design purpose. They are marginal off road except on graded and gravel surfaced roads. **Hybrids** are just that... not road bikes and not mountain bikes, they are directly in between and will do neither one very well. There are other specialty type bikes such as **BMX**, **motocross** etc. that have specific applications and limitations. **Tandem** (two-rider) bikes are also popular...and more expensive because you're buying for two people instead of one and everything has to be very durable on a tandem. You should have general cycling experience and do test rides before buying a tandem.

Our club rides are about half mountain bike and half road bike. Several club members use their mountain bikes on club road rides. A few members use touring bikes on club road rides. There are a number of road bike tandem riders in the club. Many club members have both road and mountain bikes. BMX and motocross rides are provided by other local clubs.

Right Fit

Not unlike shoes, a bike must fit to serve you well. This is especially true of road and touring bikes. Local bike shops and club experts can help here, be sure to go to a shop that has personnel who are enthusiastic about, and stock multiple choices of the type of bike you are looking for or have. For example; if there were a shop that only sold BMX bikes (or had a token road

bike), and you want to buy or get fit to a road bike, you should go elsewhere instead. Fitting a bike to you involves not only the frame size (your ability to stand over it with proper clearance) but also the positioning of the saddle fore-and-aft (a function of your upper leg length), the stem length (reach forward), stem height, handlebar width, crank arm length, and even brake lever reach for smaller hands. If the shop is not knowledgeable or willing to assist you on all of these aspects...go to a shop that is. You are buying not only the product but the service too.

You may find at first that the recommended setup is different than you thought it would be. For example: You walk into a shop with a knowledgeable and skilled salesperson; you tell them that you want a "comfortable" bike to ride. A good salesperson is *going to ask you lots of questions (and listen to the answers)* about where you intend to ride it, what your athletic experience is plus what it is anticipated to be, other influencing factors, *and lastly*, what price range you had in mind. From there, a good salesperson will interpret your needs and recommend good choices for you. Now initially, you said you wanted a "comfortable bike", but in the answers to your salesperson's questions you told them you intend to ride on the road, you're a type 'A' personality that goes whole hog into something, you're an ex-competitive runner, all your good friends are cycling 25-50 mile rides, and you expect to spend your hard earned money in the \$200 range. A poor salesperson would sell you a heavy, \$275, hybrid bike with an upright position (what you initially indicated you wanted). The good salesperson would probably recommend a road bike suitable for a sport-enthusiast, with light enough wheels so you're not at a serious handicap when riding with your friends on their \$1000-\$4000 machines, and he would recommend you upgrade your spending expectations to at least \$500 or more. Your needs would not outgrow this bike for a long time compared to that of the bike sold to you by the poor salesperson. This good salesperson will also be sure to properly fit you to the bike in all of the aspects mentioned above because a rider who is fit properly will be far more comfortable (and a rider who actually rides his bike makes a better customer).

If you are a woman you may have different fitting needs than a man. Many (not all) women are shorter, have shorter torsos, shorter arms, fingers, etc... In the past, bikes were all designed to a standard design generally suitable for men or women with longer upper bodies. Today, several manufacturers now offer bikes that are designed with the shorter upper body in mind. A good shop will help you determine if you need a "women's specific" bike or not, and spend plenty of time fitting it to you in either case.

Prices/Features for Bikes

The least cost bikes (\$200-300) are those you may find at Walmart, Kmart, or Costco. For the money, these are bargains, however, they are nearly always unusually heavy for their class, and most of the components are not upgradeable. For example, changing the gearing is unusually expensive. The numbers of gears are generally less than most experienced cyclists demand. The wheels are generally not fitted with quick-release features necessary for practical field tire repair (wrenches are required) and are very heavy. The best place to save weight on a bike, and the place to have the most effect on a bike, is on the wheels. The pedals are almost always either open old style pedals, or strap style toe clips. After a few months use, most serious cyclists move up...or better yet, avoid these bikes in the first place.

The next level of quality is the lower priced bikes (\$300-500) available in our local bike shops. Be sure to ask about features and have them explain what benefits you get for moving up a few hundred dollars to the mid-range (\$500-800) quality bikes. These are generally suitable for most purposes. The better quality bikes range from \$800-1300 and feature lighter weight top quality components. And, if you've got too much money, or too much passion for our sport, there are road and mountain bikes that are priced at several thousand dollars. These are often works of art, and are a pleasure to ride if you can afford one. A good used bike is often a wise initial choice. Have an experienced friend or shop check them out first. Watch for sprung forks or other frame alignment damage as well as the obvious condition.

Accessories

Safety is the primary concern. Helmets and hydration. Secondly, riders strive to be independently equipped to make minor field tire repairs etc. to avoid burdening fellow riders...and, to save walking home.

Must have:

Bike helmet (check for good fit, they must be snug to protect you)

Water bottle (the screw-tops are best)

Spare tube (verify size and stem type)

Tube patch kit...some of these are marginal...the spare tube is best (Rema patch kits do work if used properly, ask to be shown how)

Tire levers (necessary to get the tire off the rim)

Pump (the on-the-bike type) Road bikes need high pressure type.

(Test to make sure you can actually pump it up to the required pressure...not all pumps are alike and

some are much better than others. Many women who have less upper body strength also carry the Co2 systems for thier primary on the road inflation device with a frame pump for backup)

Small tool if you don't have quick-release wheels

Some way to carry the above: A seat post mounted bag is most common, however some choose one of the hydration/junk pocket backpack types and a few use jersey pockets alone!

Shoes that fit your pedal type

Riding shorts...with the built-in seat pads (they really are far more comfortable and reduce chafing)

Nice-to Have:

Upgraded SPD (best and most common) or Look clip-in pedals

Shoes that match above...stiff for road, walkable for MB

Riding gloves...summer and winter weights

Riding jersey...they have cool rear pockets. Check out our club jersey

Cool weather gear...such as full legged tights, wind/rain shell jackets etc. (avoid cotton!)

Removable arm and legs warmers (avoid cotton!)

Rain gear...get that made for cyclists

Rain/cool weather shoe protectors

Trip computer...handle bar mount combo odometer, speedometer, etc.

Backpack style hydration bladder

Road rider safety flashers

Sun glasses, sun tan lotion, lip balm, small tissue packets, etc.

Upgraded bike saddles... usually the softest/and or widest are not the best! (ever sat on a couch that was too soft for three hours? Same thing; it was comfy at first impression, but over time it is worse than a firmer choice)

Road riders: Mirror. Either bar-end or one of the clip-to-helmet or glasses types. The bar-end types are inexpensive and the real glass is much better than the common plastic lens. Use it, but don't rely on it...still look over your shoulder, etc...

Cell Phone, GPS, etc. etc....let your imagination rule!

Combination field repair tool...with wrench, screw driver, allen driver etc.

Chain repair tool....and of course, a few links of new chain

Chain lube...White Lightening or similar non-stain brands.

Small first aid kit, especially for backcountry mountain bike rides

Heavy duty full sized pump for your car or garage (built-in gauge best)

Car or garage bike fix-it kit...more tools if you're inclined (REI has one)

Club members are willing to share their ideas and opinions on all these items. Your local bike shops have owners that are considered regional experts, however, they must rely on your description of your objectives and budgets. We often have clinics where you can learn basic tire repair etc., and several shops have offered these as well. There are some good magazines and books that address these topics also.