

OUTDOORS

Getting started on a bike – Part 1



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Those who have been thinking of alternatives to driving for some or many of your essential trips probably have considered bicycling as a viable option considering how efficient this mode of travel is. There's not another way to cover the distance using nothing but human energy. On top of that you can carry quite a bit of gear with little extra effort.

But the practical aspects of making a bike meet everyday transportation needs can sometimes be quite challenging, especially when complicated by a transportation network planned and built with motor vehicles foremost in mind.

Perhaps the best way to start is by using your bike for short trips to the store, post office, or other tasks rather than jumping right into commuting to work. It's a good way to be able to judge your cycling skills, fitness level, and tolerance to things like weather and traffic conditions. This week's column will focus on the first steps to help you make the move away from petroleum and onto calories as your fuel of choice.

Before you do anything you should be sure the bike you'll be using is road-worthy (your choice of the bike that's best for your needs will be discussed in another column). A quick and simple way to see that it's at least minimally ready to take on the streets and sidepaths is to conduct an "ABC Quick Check".

First, be sure there's adequate Air in the tires to reduce resistance and provide maximum efficiency; have better control of the bike; and reduce chances of damaging wheels.

Next, see that the Brakes operate properly, something that's not usually a problem with pedal-based coaster brakes but might be with any other style.

Then visually check the Chain's condition in terms of rust, grime, and tension. You may also want to examine any Cables on the bike, such as those connected to brakes and gears, to be sure they're operating properly.

Finally, the mechanism that allows for Quick release of nuts that secure wheels and saddle/seat, should be tight and aimed in a way that won't allow it to be inadvertently loosened.

Before you jump on your bike, however, there's another important but often overlooked aspect of cycling effectively that needs to be considered: clothing.

Although a helmet is clearly a vital safety item it also provides cover from the sun while also ventilating your head. For some, using a helmet may seem like overkill or not worth the trouble but when one considers that it reduces incidents of serious head injuries by 85 percent in a crash it's obviously essential. Be sure it's fit properly so it has maximum effectiveness when needed.

During Southwest Florida's long summer it's almost impossible to stay free of perspiration so wear clothing that doesn't hold excess moisture and that dries quickly. Performance materials such as CoolMax and similar fabrics are

much better than cotton. Shorts, shirts, and undergarments of this type are available almost anywhere clothing can be purchased but your local bike store will have the best selection of cycling-specific items. And you can choose styles that won't make you look like a Lance Armstrong wannabe, a real plus when you get off your bike and go shopping or tend to other tasks.

Wear shorts whenever possible. Padded undergarments - attached or separate - are very helpful when riding distances over five or 10 miles at a time. Be sure they don't rub and chafe.

A jersey or shirt that's very visible is essential. White is always a good bet since it reflects sunlight rather than absorbs it as do dark colors and you'll actually be seen if you're riding after dark. Having retro-reflective material somewhere on a jersey/shirt is also very helpful for pre-dawn or night cycling.

Shoes that have relatively stiff soles will help ensure efficient power transmission to the pedals and will also reduce foot fatigue. And while I don't recommend open-toed shoes such as sandals since they don't protect all of your foot there are cycling-specific models available. Whatever you wear, if they include shoelaces be sure they are tucked-in so they don't get tangled in your pedals or chain. It's almost guaranteed you'll crash if either occurs.

Upcoming columns will focus on choosing the bike right for your needs, vehicular cycling vs. using sidepaths, route selection, and other elements of being able to use your bicycle as an effective and enjoyable alternative to a motor vehicle.

Until then I'll look for you out on the roads... ■

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19th Annual Caloosa Catch & Release held at The Pink Shell Beach Resort & Spa



Overall winners of the 19th Annual Caloosa Catch and Release were Shane Dooley, left and Billy Glass with a total of 328.5 inches of fish caught.



Hooters Catch the Big Redfish Bonanza winners were Mat Haag, left and Steve Mathews with a 14.2-inch redfish.



Second Place Team - Maverick / Yamaha - Ron Riley, Randall Marsh and Mike Dixon



Captain Lacey Rush and Kristi Riley with a 26.5-inch Red