

CYCLING TIPS



Safe riding

The key to safe cycling is riding where you have the best view and where you can best be seen by others. Don't aim to 'keep out of the way' or cycle very close to the kerb. This reduces your room for manoeuvre and makes you more likely to hit drain covers and potholes. The best position is about one metre from the kerb.

Sometimes it is safer to take a position in the centre of the lane on your side of the road. This may be when there is not enough room for cars to overtake you without forcing you too close to parked cars or the other side of the road.

Try to keep at least a door's width from parked cars, as doors may open into your path. Think carefully about overtaking on the inside, even when vehicles are stationary. Lorry and bus drivers cannot see you there.

Other road users

People driving cars typically look for other cars or lorries on the road and may not register seeing you on your bike, even when you are directly in front of them. Try to see where drivers are looking when they are about to pull out of a side road or when you want to turn.

Be aware that drivers may misjudge your speed and turn left in front of you, 'cutting you up', so be prepared to brake.

Shared off-road space

On shared paths, people walking can be taken by surprise by people passing them quickly on bikes. A sudden appearance can be an unpleasant shock, particularly for people with visual or hearing impairment, even if you allow enough space. Bear in mind that people may not know you're there, so slow down and let them know you're coming, or stop if necessary. If in doubt, just get off and walk.

Sitting comfortably

A good riding position makes the world of difference to easy riding. The best saddle height for the least effort allows your legs to be almost fully extended when the pedal is at the bottom of its cycle, but newer riders will feel safer being able to have their feet on the ground, at least on their toes, when seated on the saddle. Position the saddle where you are comfortable, and, as you become more confident, raise it to the optimum level.

Maintenance

Check brakes, cables, tyres, chain and lights regularly. Ensure tyres are at high enough pressure, usually at least 60psi, which may sound high to a car driver. Pressure required will be marked on the wall of the tyre. This helps stop punctures and reduces effort in cycling. Also check over tyres for bits that may work their way into the rubber.

Punctures

If you are not used to fixing punctures it can take time, but gets a lot quicker with practice. It is usually faster to replace the inner tube with a spare, than patching a tube on the bike, and repair the punctured tube later, but check the tyre to find what may have caused it. There is no point in replacing an inner tube only for it to be punctured again. You can use puncture resistant tyres with protective strips of materials like Kevlar in them.

Mudguards

Many mountain bikes come without mudguards, but a set will keep you (and the cyclist behind you) from getting wet and dirty. Snap on guards can be quickly fitted, but are less effective than those that fit closely around your wheels.

Brakes

Brakes should work instantly – as soon as you squeeze the lever. They are important for you maintaining control and riding safely. If they feel spongy or squeal, they need adjusting. The brake blocks may be worn down and need replacing or the cable may have stretched and need replacing or adjusting. Both are quite easy to fix. Blocks should hit the rim squarely and should not touch the tyres.

Security

Buy a good quality lock and use it. Even better, use two different types of lock. Lock both wheels and the bike frame to a stand or other solid object –not just a wheel. Lock any quick-release parts or take them with you, e.g. saddle, lights, bags.

Ideally, ensure your bike is not left in a secluded location or where it can be lifted over a post (signs can be unscrewed). Be aware that a lock lying on or near the ground can be smashed and tools can be inserted in space within a D-lock to force it apart, so get into good locking up habits.

What to wear

You don't need to be in lycra! For longer distances it's best to layer up with thin clothes. A light waterproof jacket is a good idea. You will warm up quickly on your bike, but it is possible to commute happily in the right clothes without getting sweaty, if you're not going too far or very fast, as sweat evaporates. Woollens or sports base layers are far more breathable than cottons. Most regular winter riders keep a pair of waterproof over-trousers in their bags and you'll need waterproof or at least wind-proof gloves.

Be seen

Modern LED lights are bright and cheap. One set of batteries will last most of the winter.

Use lights in mist and rain as well as the dark. Ensure lights work properly and are not obscured by clothing or bags. Bright clothes or high visibility wear and reflectors are a good idea.

Helmets

Make sure they are the right size and conform to BSEN1078 or Snell Foundation B90 standards. Damage to used helmets may not be obvious and they should be replaced after a serious impact. Helmets are not compulsory and there is some debate about their effect on road safety. However, in many circumstances they are added protection.

Carrying stuff

It's amazing how much you can carry in panniers without feeling unbalanced on the bike. Panniers are usually about 16-18 litre capacity per pannier and will need a bike rack. Don't be tempted to hang bags from your handlebars. This can seriously affect your balance and can get caught in the wheel spokes.

Bike trailers can carry even more and take some effort out of the cycling. They usually take up more room on the road though.

