

Advice to new graduates of the Bicycle Riding School

These are the things we want you to be able to do with a bicycle:

- * **Ride it reasonably straight.** There will always be a little wobble, but it will get smaller with time.
- * **Be able to start even uphill** by pushing off with your ground foot as well as the pedal foot.
- * **Look around and behind you** without swerving and being able to see and think about what's there
- * **Stop** if anything bad or unexpected happens
- * **Stand up off the seat** a little while coasting, for bumps that you can't avoid and, when you get good, maybe while pedaling, to help get up a steep hill
- * **Switch gears** so that you have a comfortable amount of resistance for the grade you're biking on. Be able to shift to a lower gear for going up a hill and to a higher gear for biking on a flat stretch or down hill. (75-100 rpm is good, they say, more than once a second. This is turning a little faster than a lot of people would normally assume. But don't worry about this. Just get in a comfortable gear for you.)
- * **Take one hand off the handlebar** to signal an upcoming turn or to scratch your nose
- * **Relax and enjoy** the ride
- * **Be very cautious** and slow down if anything seems iffy. Just stop if you're not sure you'll make it by something or someone. Take it easy. You can always go fast, if you want, later

When all this is comfortable, it's also good to try:

- * Getting going and stopping without being on the seat. First try getting off by first standing up and then stepping down. Later, you can learn to start with a foot on the pedal, but not sitting on the seat. If you learn this new way of getting on and off, you have the option of riding at the "standard" height, which is pretty high, so that your knee is almost straight at the bottom of your stroke. Another option for getting your leg straight is getting a flat-foot technology bike (a stretch limousine) or else getting a kick-back seat post on your bike.

Until you learn this new way of riding, do not let anyone tell you that you don't need to be able to reach the ground from sitting on the seat. Tell the people in the bike store that your teacher told you to get a bike where you can put the balls of your feet firmly on the ground while seated. You can always raise the seat later, when you get good and learn that harder way of getting on and off.

- * When you can think and ride at the same time, you can start considering using your bike on roads. Start with plenty of time on the path and, when you get really good at making the bicycle go exactly where you have in mind, you can probably do roads if you want to. Never let anyone you're riding with put pressure on you to go across a road or do anything when you're not sure you have enough space. Let yourself be a little bit of a baby, and just go when you, yourself, have the feeling that there's plenty of room, even if you wobble a bit getting going. You might want to only ride with certain people or alone to avoid such pressure.

The bike you probably want is a comfort hybrid. The one we use a lot is a Specialized Expedition. It has too fat tires to be a real hybrid, but it feels like one.

If you like, you can set up a road riding session with us to help you get started on the road. We also organize alumni rides. Let us know if you want to be notified about either alumni rides or road riding classes.

To see a list of bike paths in the area, see MassBike's list at <http://massbike.org/resourcesnew/pathstrails>.

With bikes we can get rid of many of the cars that jam up our cities while staying in good health at the same time! Thanks for being part of that.

Happy riding!

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