



*Girl
meets*



Bike

Such a fun, accessible form of exercise and efficient transport as the bicycle deserves to be far more popular amongst women says Ruth Brooker. The sun's shining so give it a go...

PHOTOS: WIG WORLAND

Just a bit more effort, a quick grimace, a few more grinding pedal strokes and I'm up over the hill. It's all down from here. The sun warms my bare arms; the spring breeze flaps my T-shirt and the low whirr of free-wheeling hums beneath me. Ah! The open road. I could go anywhere – France, India, Australia – but today, maybe I'll just go to town.

The longer days and summer warmth have got me in the mood for riding. But there's always a reason not to and I've heard them all from the girls: "oh well, my bike's got a puncture... I don't like sweating... I've got hairy legs... my thighs look fat in lycra... I'm scared of the traffic... it's uncomfortable." How many women specific bikes are quietly rusting, languishing behind the lawnmower in the shed? Over the winter it is easier to step into the car; but beware - a few months of neglect soon become a lifelong habit.

Sweaty, grunting men

It's a shame that such a fun, accessible form of exercise and efficient transport is not more popular amongst us wimmin. So why should you bother riding? Well, it gets you outside to exercise and this means you avoid stuffy gyms with sweaty, grunting, men thumping along on treadmills. Cycle commuting will keep you in shape and you can smugly cruise past all the town traffic. Even a two-mile ride each day will help with your health and overall fitness. Statistically, you are less likely to have an accident than a motorist. And riding your bike means you are actively contributing to bettering our environment. If it rains, you feel immensely impressed with yourself for having battled the elements. Most importantly, a regular cyclist gets to eat cake. Yes it does burn fat.

Getting (back) into it

Assuming the lure of cake is enough to get you out on the bike, you'll find it's so easy to get (back) into the groove if you just take it easy:

1. Start small and pleasurable. Grab a friend and ride out for a Sunday pub trip on one of our relaxing, traffic free national cycle paths (you'll find them on www.sustrans.org.uk).
2. You don't have to get sweaty. It's possible to pootle along at a slower speed and not get dishevelled. Plus the wind keeps you cool.
3. Riding in traffic needn't be scary. Wear bright clothing and ride away from the kerb. At traffic lights, always wait in front of the traffic so drivers know you are there.
4. Busy mums can make cycling part of their day: ride to the local shops and fit a child seat or a tag along to take junior with you (reviewed in BB issue 3).
5. For those who want to look the business on their bike, there's a good range of flattering female cycling kit these days – www.minx-girl.com – and Topshop have recently launched a range of cycling fashion accessories. You don't have to wear a skin-suit.
6. If you're not loving urban cycling, hire a mountain bike and get out into the hills at one of the UK's many trail centres.
7. For practical info that's focussed on getting girls back in the saddle, check out Sustrans' new website: www.bikebelles.org.uk

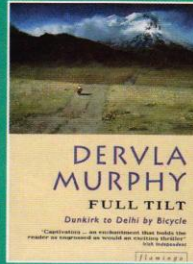
Eek! Spanners

Some women love spanners and stuff while bike maintenance can scare others away from riding all together. But it doesn't take much effort to keep your bicycle running smoothly and it will be more of a wpleasure to ride. The minimum required is to pump the tyres, oil the chain and learn how to fix a puncture. For more complicated maintenance, find a male friend and exchange cake for bike servicing skills. If you're feeling really eager, watch him fix it and pick up some basic tips.

Don't let the boys have all the fun. Go on, join the revolution. ☘

Inspiring Words

Nothing gets you ready to ride like an inspirational book



Full Tilt

by Dervla Murphy

There are no limits to where you can go on a bike. For inspiring world adventures, check out Dervla's trip from Dunkirk to Delhi in 1963 – a different world before satnav and mobile phones. Part of her kit was a fully loaded pistol...

ESSENTIAL FEMALE KIT



Bicycle

Ensure that your bike fits you properly: cycling should never be painful. You shouldn't be straining to reach the handlebars. Adjust the saddle to the correct height: your knee should be slightly bent when the pedal is at its lowest. The best bike companies make women specific frames for the whole range of bicycles from shopper up. Giant, for example, make a female version of their full on Cypher 1 MTB. See them all at giant-bicycles.com

Women's Saddles

Avoid soft saddles that look like sofas: they are only suitable for short distances. To fit, a saddle must be wide at the back to fit your sit bones. You can now find women-specific saddles from major companies like Specialized and Bontrager. Amongst other things they have a cut-out to relieve the pressure on sensitive areas. This is the Selle Italia LADY SLR saddle, more info at selleitalia.com



Female Kit

Female specific cycling kit makes all the difference. You can get jerseys with built in sports bras and, most important, women's cycling shorts, which are key to keeping your undercarriage happy on longer rides. The chamois between you and the saddle should be a firm pad; at first this may feel like a nappy. These are from Santini. Check out santinism.it