



Buying the Right Bike For You, the HRER member riding with the club

From time to time during the cycling season, I am asked for advice about what kind of bike to buy. I'm no expert, but over the years, and having owned more than a dozen bikes, I've learned; not only from my own mistakes but from hearing of the unfortunate experiences of others who have ended up with a bike that wasn't really what they wanted, didn't fit properly, was too heavy, or the gears were inadequate for our Haliburton hills. Maybe there is something in this article that will help you ask the right questions as you search for the right bike for you.

Perhaps this is your first bike, but more likely you are replacing an older bike with something more to your liking. While this does not require the same level of commitment as, say, getting married, buying a bike is a big decision that warrants some careful thought.

What is the Right Kind of Bike for Me?

There are four (actually more now that E-bikes and Fat bikes are on the scene) different kinds of bikes. Your first and most important decision will be about the main type of riding you want to do. This is the most important question, and only you can answer it. The terrain can be hilly at times in Haliburton but club rides will have alternate routes with lesser elevation. Most roads are quiet, some newly paved some not so smooth, some sections of gravel. Do you ride hard for fitness, purely for recreation with friends or...? Decide on this, and you're half way there. Ask friends and fellow bikers

about their experiences to help form your decision. If you can't decide, don't buy a new bike!

Types of Bikes

Road Bikes. At the top end, these are designed for paved roads and for going fast. Lightweight frame, slim tires and bent handlebars, which allow for a variety of aero dynamic riding positions, are all characteristics of the road bike. If you want to go fast on a paved highway, consider a road bike. They come in many different options (& prices), race bikes, sportive, endurance and touring, each specifically designed for a particular purpose. A new development in road bikes and rising in popularity, is the "**Gravel**" bike, which as its name implies is designed for gravel roads, poor quality roads with holes, broken pavement etc., yet still looks and acts much like a road bike with wider tires (i.e. more stable in gravel).

Mountain Bikes. These bikes are solid, with robust frames, knobby tires and feature an upright riding position, compared to road bikes. These bikes are designed to handle off-road, rugged trails but for our type of riding, unless you are riding off road, there are better choices. **Fat Bikes** are a recent (growing) niche market, not suited to riding in an HRER group. They are like a mountain bike on steroids, great for very rough trails and of all the bike types these have the best stability on snow (NOT on ice), they are also quite heavy. A 'fun' bike for snow and trails.

Hybrid Bikes. These bikes have been the best compromise between road bikes and mountain bikes over the years and offer good features if most of your riding will be shorter distances on relatively level paved or light gravel roads. They have wider tires, are a bit heavier and have a more upright riding position than road bikes, making them the most suitable for city riding, rail trails in good condition and paved country roads where you will enjoy their durability and comfort. The Gravel bike referred to above is expected to compete in the Hybrid market.

The next group of bikes I'm going to lump together:

Tandems and Recumbents. Many couples enjoy riding together and **Tandems** allow riders of different levels of strength and endurance to enjoy their ride together. Riding a tandem truly is an experience in compromise and

cooperation, but the rewards of riding together are many. Tandems also allow disabled riders, perhaps someone who is blind, to enjoy cycling as the stoker behind the captain. Because they bear more weight than a single bike, tandems are heavy and therefore slow to get up hills. But on the flat and downhill, they fly! Tandems can be difficult to transport on a car or in an SUV. At our age, it's not a good idea to lift a tandem onto a car's roof rack. They need a dedicated "tandem rack" which can be very expensive. As well, from personal experience, we have learned that if one member of the "tandem team" is injured and unable to ride, that ruins it for the partner as well.

Recumbents are, in a word, comfort! The unique riding position brings no discomfort to the derriere; no back, shoulder or neck pain and no pressure on the wrists, which can lead to carpal tunnel syndrome. Riding a recumbent is like sitting in a lounge chair on wheels. The initial "learning curve" can be a bit twitchy and since different leg muscles are involved it takes some time to get used to. They climb slowly as they are heavy, but downhill, look out! We have been riding recumbent for about 15 years and we wouldn't sacrifice the comfort we've come to enjoy by returning to ride a traditional tandem. My recumbent trike allows me to ride solo all day and I never have to put my foot down!

E-bikes Five years ago, we converted our recumbent tandem to an E-assist bike. The system feels the torque we are applying to the pedals and gives us a percentage of assist which we choose. On a full charge, range is about 80 km. We can now easily manage hills which we struggled with before the conversion. However, it was a very expensive addition and it added 35 kg or 16 pounds to an already heavy bike! We also soon discovered that we needed to upgrade our brakes to hydraulic discs as losing control of your speed on a downhill on a tandem is neither fun nor safe!

Where To Go To Buy a Bike

Go to a reputable specialist bike store, one that offers solid after-market service. From my experience, the folks that work at these stores are avid cyclists. Many commute to and from work, and tour extensively and some race but the bottom line is, they know cycling and they are interested in selling you a bike you will be happy with. Some of these

stores are listed on our club's website, and some will let you test ride before you buy. Good idea! Why should you shell out good money if you can't "try it on" first? **DO NOT** buy a bike from a hardware store, from Wal Mart or Canadian Tire. The sales folks at those stores are often teen-age part timers making minimum wage, and they know little about the bike that might have caught your eye. The after sales service will be non-existent.

How To Tell if the Bike Fits

A good bike store will have a trainer machine set up and will put you on the bike you are considering to see if it might be a "fit", and they will watch you pedal. They will watch your hips, shoulders, arms, etc. You may pay extra for this service, but this is the only way to really tell if the bike is right for you. Money well spent. Above all, make certain you can stand over the bike, with both feet flat on the ground, and clear the top tube by 2". Except perhaps on "tippy toes" you should not be able to touch the ground while sitting on the seat. But, you must be able to touch the ground easily when you straddle the top tube!

Regardless of the type of bike you choose, ask questions about the gears. In Haliburton, you will be riding some challenging hills. It's unavoidable. Having a bike with 27 or 30 gears means little if the low gear is not low enough and forces you to struggle up hills, or walk. Fortunately, this is an easy fix as a good bike shop can swap out gears to make your ride smooth, safe and enjoyable. (We seldom regret not having a bigger gear for the fast downhills, but we always regret not having a low enough gear for the grind going uphill!)

The seat. You will be spending almost 100% of your time on your new bike sitting on the seat, or saddle. There is a significant difference between men's and ladies saddles, so ask to have the saddle changed, if necessary, to suit your unique physique! A good bike shop will do this for free. Get on it, test ride and if you're not happy and comfortable, ask to have the saddle changed. Do not fall for the wide, soft gel seat. Feels great sitting on it, but pedalling for an hour or more will chafe! Make sure the saddle shape fits you. You'll get used to the firmness of a properly designed saddle and you'll appreciate the lack of chafing.

At our rides, before we take off, walk around and look at all the different types of bikes and ask questions of the owners, they'll be only too happy to discuss their 'steeds'. Many members of the club are quite experienced in proper bike choosing and fitting. They bring to our membership a wealth of knowledge. Seek them out. The info they can share is free and valuable and will help you choose the right bike for you and make it a perfect fit.

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