

Finding your perfect bike

There's a lot to think about when choosing your wheels of steel.

Before you buy

You need to think about a budget. You've got the cost of the bike, of course, but there's also the cost of clothing and other equipment.

You can pay anything from £70 to £7,000 for a road bike. Somewhere in between lies the right answer – and you'll be pleased to know it's nearer the bottom end of the scale than the top.

A good bike will last you many years, so it's worth stretching the budget if you can. Avoid the really cheap stuff they sell in garages and general stores. It will weigh a ton, be horribly uncomfortable and is guaranteed to break down on you. If you're budget is tight, you're probably better off getting something second hand.

Unless you're planning to do off road riding, avoid mountain bikes. The cheap ones are heavy, the fat tyres create enormous rolling resistance on the road and suspension (front or full) will only sap your pedal-power.

There are a lot of hybrid bikes now on the market. These usually have straight handlebars and are a more upright riding position. They can be quite light and have tyres which are much thinner than those on mountain bikes, but wider than those found on road bikes.

If you really want to get the miles in, take a look at a road bike. You can get some really good models from around £500 upwards. The lightweight carbon models now kick in at the £900 mark.

Feel comfortable with the gears

Most bikes these days come with a huge number of gears – 30 is quite common. Talk to your dealer about the right gearing for you. Tell him/ her what sort of riding you are planning to do – mainly on the flat; rolling countryside or v hilly. Don't be too macho about gearing. There's nothing worse than running out of gears on a steep hill. A bottom gear of 30 (front) and 29 (rear) is plenty for most people.

Bikes can be gender specific

Women's bikes often have a top tube that is shorter in length because women have a shorter reach. The traditional step-through women's bikes are still available, but not many women go cycling in skirts these days. More common are women's bikes with a sloping top tube, which provides a stiffer frame than the see-through models, ensuring more of the power you put through the pedals is used to make you go forward.