

BICYCLE HELEN PIDD

FOR MY MUM AND DAD

PENGUIN

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HELEN PIDD

Love your bike: the complete guide to everyday cycling



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 6

▶ From the Velocipede to the Velodrome: A potted history of bicycles and bicycling

1. HOW TO BUY A BIKE 16

- ↘ The Dutch bike
- ↘ The hybrid bike
- ▶ The folding bike
- ↘ The road bike
- ↘ The mountain bike
 ↘ The fixed gear bike
- → Other kinds of bike
- ↘ Buying a bike

2. ACCESSORIZING YOU AND YOUR BIKE 56

- ightarrow The absolute essentials
- > Other recommended accessories
- 凶 Other accessories you might fancy
- ${\bf \ \ }$ And now for the great helmet debate
- ↘ Carrying stuff
- 🎽 Child seats
- ↘ Trailers, wagons and cargo bikes

3. CYCLING CHIC 82

- 🔰 For her
- 🎽 For him
- ightarrow Why padded pants are your best friend
- Staying chic in poor weather
- ↘ Technical gear: urgh
- ↘ Coping with helmet hair
- ≥ Why might I need proper cycling shoes?

4. LOOKING AFTER YOUR BIKE 106

- Anatomy of a bike
- ↘ Quick bike check
- ↘ How to pump up tyres properly
- ${\color{black}{ { \scriptstyle { \sf J} } }}$ How to change a flat tyre
- ⊻ Wash 'n' go
- 😕 Keeping your bike schtum
- ➡ Emergency repairs
- ☑ Getting your bike serviced
- ↘ Bike maintenance FAQs

5. CYCLING SAFELY 132

- ↘ The three golden rules
- ↘ Safety accessories
- ↘ The enemies of cycling
- Ŋ How to . . .
- ↘ Accidents
- ↘ Cycling etiquette
- ▶ How likely am I to get caught breaking the law on my bike?
- ${\scriptstyle {\color{black} {\color{blac} {\color{blac} {\color{black} {\color{black} {\color{blac} {\color{blac} {\color{blac} {\color{bla$
- ↘ Cycle training

6. KEEPING YOUR BIKE YOURS 160

- ↘ Which lock?
- ightarrow Other security measures
- ${\color{black}{\triangleright}}$ The do's and don'ts of locking your bike
- ↘ Safe storage solutions
- ☑ Extra security measures
- ↘ But if your bike is stolen . . .

7. CYCLING TO WORK 178

- ↘ Excuses, excuses
- ↘ Cycle to work scheme
- ▹ Pool your bike schemes

8. CYCLING FOR LEISURE 200

- ↘ Cycle touring
- ↘ Trains, planes, ferries and automobiles
- ↘ Bike racks for cars
- ↘ Classic bike rides
- ↘ Cycling while on holiday

9. CYCLING FOR SPORT AND FITNESS 224

- ≥ Sportives
- ↘ Charity rides
- ↘ Competitive cycling
- ↘ Cycling to get fit
- 凶 Occupational hazards of being a cyclist
- ${\bf \supseteq}$ Cycling for people with weak knee problems

GLOSSARY 246

FURTHER READING, WATCHING AND LISTENING 248 INDEX 252 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 256

INTRODUCTION

'The two-wheeled velocipede is the animal which is to supersede everything else. It costs but little to produce, and still less to keep. It does not eat cart loads of hay, and does not wax fat and kick. It is easy to handle. It never rears up. It won't bite. It needs no check or rein or halter, or any unnatural restraint. It is little and light, let alone it will lean lovingly against the nearest support. It never flies off at a tangent unless badly managed and under no circumstances will it shy at anything . . .'

The Velocipedist, New York, 1 February 1869

Is there any invention more marvellous than the bicycle? When Radio 4's *You and Yours* conducted a poll in 2005 to find out what listeners considered 'the most significant technological innovation since 1800', the bicycle won almost 60 per cent of the vote, streets ahead of the computer, radio and television. It is hard to think of any other manmade object that provides joy, exercise and transport for so many people at such a low cost. When velocipedomania took hold in the late nineteenth century with the large-scale manufacture of the bicycle's forerunner, the velocipede, Victorians were agog at the capability of this 'mechanical horse'. Over in the United States in 1869, J. T. Goddard wrote with awe of 'a wonderful and fascinating little two-wheeled machine, upon which one could so gracefully annihilate time and space'.

A hundred and fifty years on, riding a bike that Goddard would easily recognize as a close relative of his own, I feel the same. Sometimes, when I'm whizzing down a hill, the wind in my hair and a daft smile on my face, I can't quite believe that a combination of metal, rubber and plastic can bring me such pleasure.

Ever since my dad unscrewed the stabilizers from my first bike and I wobbled off down our road on my own, cycling has been part of my life. When I was little, it gave me the freedom to get to the shop and buy sweets without my mum finding out; as I got older, it sped me to lectures on time when I had slept through my alarm. Nowadays, my bike gets me to work, transports my groceries, takes me on adventures and shows me new places – and I would be lost (and late) without it.

I'm not the only one. Though it hasn't yet become 'the animal... to supersede everything else', more and more people are rediscovering cycling as the most civilized, economic, ecological and enjoyable way of getting from A to B. In 2009, the UK experienced its highest level of cycling for seventeen years, according to the national cyclists' organization the CTC (Cyclists' Touring Club). There are many reasons why – a hugely successful initiative from the government to provide tax-free bikes for those wanting to cycle to work, the ever-rising price in petrol and an increased awareness of environmental issues, to name but three.

But compared with countries such as Holland and Denmark, which have invested heavily in cycling infrastructure, in the UK, riding a bicycle still remains a minority activity. According to Department of Transport figures from 2007, just 1 per cent of journeys in the UK are made by bike, even though 43 per cent of people aged five and over own one. That's partially because cycling has an image problem, many people believing it to be difficult, frightening and expensive. I hope this book will convince you it isn't.

You don't need to change your life to fit in cycling. You can fit cycling into the life you have already. I'm not trying to turn you into a Serious Cyclist. You're just you, same as always, but on a bike.

I'm going to guide you through every aspect of cycling, whether you're new to the saddle or have been riding for years, by providing answers to those niggling questions you might have at the back of your mind. What's the point of buying an expensive bike? How can I avoid getting knocked off? Will anything deter a really determined bike thief? Is it worth learning how to mend a puncture when the man in the bike shop will do it for me for a tenner?

I know the answers to all these questions because I've been there. I've had three bikes stolen in three years and learned the hard way that scrimping on locks is a false economy. I've gone to work with black nails after fixing a puncture by the side of the road. I've been patronized by bike snobs, bamboozled in bike shops and searched for years to find a helmet that didn't make my head look like a cannonball. I've cycled in dresses and heels and survived Tour de France climbs as well as Britain's busiest roads. If I haven't done it myself, I've talked to police officers, campaigners, bike shop assistants, mechanics and fashion designers who have.

By the end of this book, I hope you'll be itching to go for a ride. But to start you off, here are ten of the best reasons to get on your bike:



















1. WHAT DO YOU PRIMARILY WANT TO USE THE BIKE FOR?

If you cycle, you are not at the mercy of bus routes, train timetables or road-works. A bicycle doesn't experience delays when there are leaves on the line. It doesn't stop operating at midnight. It never runs out of petrol. It can take you where you want, when you want, and you always know what time you'll arrive.

$m{\gamma}$. IT WILL SAVE YOU MONEY

✓ ➤ If I relied on public transport to travel the four miles to work and back every day, I would spend over £1,000 a year. If I drove, the bill for petrol, tax, insurance, parking and an MOT would come to at least that amount – before I'd even factored in the cost of buying a car. By comparison, even if I treated myself to a swish new bike every twelve months and had it properly serviced twice yearly, I would still be saving a lot of money.

. IT'S A GREAT STRESS RELIEVER

➤ Arthur Conan Doyle wrote, 'When the spirits are low, when the day appears dark, when work becomes monotonous, when hope hardly seems worth having, just mount a bicycle and go out for a spin down the road, without thought on anything but the ride you are taking.' After a bad day at the office, getting on your bike and pounding the pedals makes everything better. If I have a tough decision to make, I go for a ride. I always have a much clearer perspective when I'm done.

. IT'S SUPER EFFICIENT

 As a human-powered way of getting from A to B, cycling is much less work than running or walking, and way more fun on the downhills. You use around 20 per cent of the same energy to cycle a mile as you do to walk it.

. IT WILL MAKE YOU FIT

> Start cycling regularly, and you'll have a healthier heart, stronger lungs, a firmer bum and much lovelier legs. Unlike many other forms of physical activity, riding a bike is suitable for people of all levels of fitness.

. IT'S EMPOWERING

V Whether it's mending your first puncture, completing a charity bike ride or making it up a steep hill, cycling is a great confidence booster. It is also a political force for good. The suffragettes cycled, seeing the bicycle as a key tool in the emancipation of women. In the Minneapolis Tribune in 1895, Ann Strong wrote, 'The bicycle is just as good company as most husbands and, when it gets old and shabby, a woman can dispose of it and get a new one without shocking the entire community.'

7. IT'S GREEN

If we don't want our children to swim to work in the future, we're going to have to cut back on carbon-spewing forms of transport. Bicycles are one answer. Meandering down country lanes and exploring new territory by bike is so much more enjoyable than getting a 'cheap' flight to an airport hours away from where you actually want to go, at a far higher price than advertised.

Q. IT CAN CARRY YOUR BAGS

➤ A bicycle can be quite the packhorse. With the right panniers, you can transport far more shopping than you would ever manage on foot. Add a trailer, and you could move house.

. IT WILL SHOW YOU NEW THINGS

Y Travelling by bike rather than by car, you experience the world differently. The view from the saddle is much better than from behind the wheel. Not only can you travel along towpaths and through forests closed to cars, but you can smell the flowers and hear the animals and birds as you go.

∩. IT CAN TAKE YOU ANYWHERE YOU LIKE

Riding a bike doesn't just free you from the tyranny of public transport, it also offers almost endless travel opportunities. Whether you want to cycle to a country pub, over to a friend's house or across continents, the only thing that will hold you back is your legs.

FROM THE VELOCIPEDE TO THE VELODROME: A POTTED HISTORY OF BICYCLES AND BICYCLING

1817 Baron Karl Friedrich invents the *draisienne* or hobby horse, the first practical attempt to use two wheels for personal transport. The machine has no pedals, but is propelled by the rider sitting astride the central seat and taking exaggerated steps along the road. 1839 Scottish blacksmith Kirkpatrick Macmillan invents a bicycle-like machine that is operated by the rider pushing up and down on pedal-like 'treadles', which he uses to cycle the 71 miles from his home in Dumfries to Glasgow. He fails to patent his invention and many others develop his design and take the credit. [NB: some people insist none

of this ever happened and that the whole Macmillan story is a hoax.)

1861 Frenchman Pierre Michaux develops a more sophisticated is pedal-driven bicycle, the ng velocipede. Velocipedomania begins. Indoor riding academies, similar to rollerskating rinks, become all the rage in large ow, cities. **1868** An article in *Once a Week* on 21 March 1868 describes Paris as being 'inflicted with a serious nuisance: velocipedes, machines like the ghosts of departed spiders, on which horrible boys and detestable men career about the streets and boulevards'.

1869 'Velocipedists are imbeciles on wheels!' declares French newspaper *Le Gaulois*.

1870s The ordinary, aka the penny-farthing, comes into circulation.

r, aka the **1884** The more nes into know it starts streets with tl

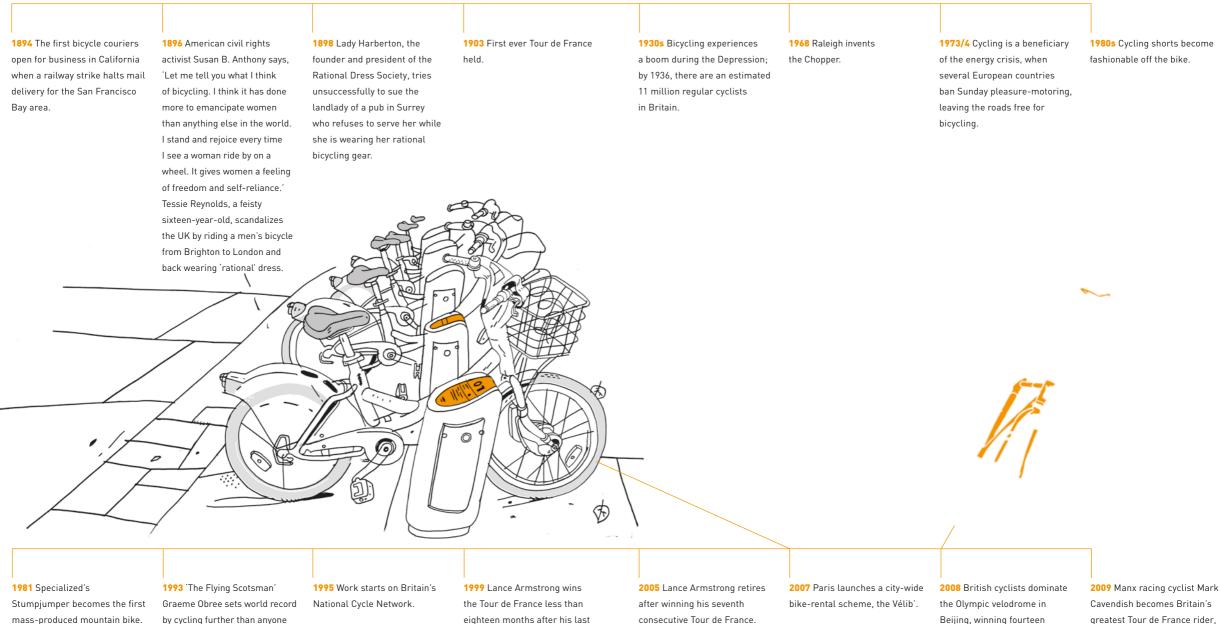
1884 The modern bicycle as we know it starts to appear on the streets with the invention of the Rover 'safety' bicycle.

1888 John Boyd Dunlop invents an air-filled inflatable tyre.



12 INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION 13



chemotherapy treatment for

testicular cancer.

mass-produced mountain bike.

14 INTRODUCTION

else in an hour on a bike he built

from, among other things,

a washing-machine part.

winning six stages.

medals, including eight golds.