

So You Want to Buy a Bike?

By Christopher Kolm

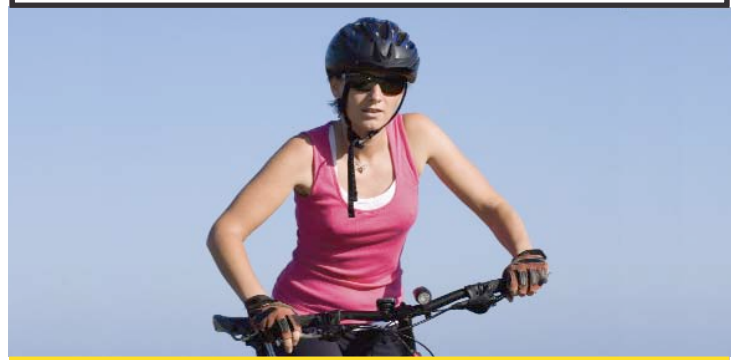
Christopher Kolm rides with Lamorinda Cycling Club/Synergy-Taleo Racing Team

This time of year, many parents and kids have thoughts of what they will give and get this holiday season. Visions of a gleaming new bike under the tree dance in the imagination of kids and adults alike. Receiving a bike meets all sorts of criteria for holiday gift giving; it's big, shiny, it represents freedom for an eight year old and for those with a technical bent, it has gears and mechanisms and some even come with a bell. It also is good for your health and gets you out of the house and onto trails and roads for some adventure. Experiences that are muted in a car like the changes in season, the differences in temperature between Moraga Road and Pinehurst, and of course the speed of the flats, the struggle up hills and the thrill of downhills, are very real and immediate on a bicycle. To get an experience of a "journey" in a car, you have to travel for a day, on a bike it takes an hour.

Walking into a local bike shop and choosing from the hundreds of models, shapes and sizes can be daunting. It used to be easier. There were two or three kinds of bikes with simple to understand sizes and a choice between three or ten speeds. Some of the new bikes have very creative frame geometry, full suspensions and you have to choose between carbon, titanium, aluminum, steel and hybrid frames. And there's center vs. side pull brakes; full, front and no suspension, comfort fit vs. racing fit; special clip-on shoes with cleats; and ten different kinds of seats. WAIT – I just wanted to buy a bike and have some fun on the trails around Lamorinda.

First question to ask yourself before buying a bike is, "what kind of riding will be done and where?" When you've figured this out, go to a local bike shop and describe what you want to do on the bike. Sales folks at the shop should be able to turn your idea into a couple of choices and price ranges. If you're riding with kids younger than eight, you are probably going to be riding on the Lafayette-Moraga Trail on the weekends and so for yourself, you might want to hold off on that high-end Trek Madone. Get something that is immediately comfortable to sit on and has tires wider than a half inch. Similar rules for buying bikes for kids. Younger riders won't ride bikes where they have to rock back and forth to touch their toes. If you're buying a bike as a gift, according to Matt Sharp of Sharp Bicycles in Lafayette, the most important piece of information to bring into the store with you is the height of the person who will be riding it.

If you are interested in riding in a group that meets on the weekends and rides 40 or more miles, you might want to get a lighter bike with 20-30 gears where the shifters are integrated with the brake levers on the handlebars. The reason the handlebars are curved down is to keep the rider out of the wind. This position takes some getting used to and a "bike fit" is necessary. The longer you plan to ride in a leaning forward position on a bike,



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the more important it is to have someone who knows what they are doing fit you to your bike. Bike fit includes position of the feet on the pedals, angle of the knees during pedaling motion, angle of your hips, shoulders and elbows in the three normal positions on the handlebars among other measurements. Don't be concerned when the technician pulls out a plumb bob and a goniometer, they are tools of the trade that will ensure many happy hours on the bike.



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