

The Skinny on Cycling
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"I think I'm going to buy that bike." I said to my mother. We had stopped at a "super store" and I had found a bike on clearance for about \$75.00. She asked me "Why that one? Is it a good one?" I figured that it must be a good one since it had seven gears, a nice squishy seat and it was painted sleek black and had a place to put an optional drink holder. At that point in my limited cycling experience, those seemed like fine qualities to me!

When I arrived at my house, my wife watched with her hands on her hips as I unloaded my new trusty steed in the driveway. I pretended not to notice that she rolled her eyes a bit before offering me some gentle words of encouragement about my new healthy hobby.

I told her "Honey, riding a bike is a healthy and inexpensive hobby. After all, once you have a bike, all you need is some time and the open road. And look, Dear, it came with this great drink holder! So I'm set! This won't cost much and it might even help me lose a little more weight."

By that time I had lost about 30 pounds and was looking and feeling better and was I needed an aerobic activity to continue my weight loss. I fondly recalled riding a bike as a kid and remembering the feeling of the wind in my hair as I shifted the big car-style gear shift knob on my metallic orange Schwinn Stingray with the chopper handle bars, the banana seat and the sissy bar.

That bike and I became fast friends. My half-mile trip down the road turned into five mile journeys to the local Dairy Queen. (To minimize the irony, I ate no-sugar-added ice cream.) Within a few weeks I was riding 15-20 miles and was soon realizing that my clearance rack bike wasn't quite cut out for the "serious cyclist" I was becoming.

Soon, I made a trip to Bicycle Garage Indy and I told a nice fellow named Travis my story. He gave me a knowing look when I said "Gosh, man. I'm really starting to get into this cycling stuff." After I described my cycling goals as including Sunday afternoon rides and maybe a 20 mile ride from time to time, he helped me pick out a really great hybrid bike. Although the arrival of this new bike again sent my wife's eyes to rolling, I was in absolute heaven! I rode it almost every day and was amazed that having 21 gears is approximately three times better than having only seven.

Within a month or two, I had ridden the hybrid on my first organized ride. That day I rode 50 miles in gym shorts with platform pedals and although a little saddle sore, I was quite pleased with myself. I enjoyed some great conversation

with other cyclists, got a lot of good advice and after that ride, I set my sights on riding a century.

That afternoon, I went home and bragged to my wife that I had ridden 50 miles. That was a big accomplishment for me. After all, the previous summer I had weighed over 300 pounds and refused to ride anything that required pushing a pedal more than once to make it go. She told me that she thought it was great that I was riding and losing weight and choosing more healthy activities. She also told me that “It was great that I had made a wise investment in a good bike that would last me for years.” And “With all those gears I should be able to ride up any hill and even longer distances.” And “I see your new bike has two drink holders, dear, which is very nice too.” I think I noticed her eyes rolling again.

With all her support and kind words, I decided to tell her my good news and try some of my newly-found cycling lingo on her. “Honey,” I said. “I was talking to some really serious cyclists while I was riding my ‘half-century’ today and they had a lot of great advice. They told me that I should invest in a pair of cycling shorts with a cushion in them so that my behind won’t be as sore.” She rolls her eyes a little. “And they also said that since I’m enjoying myself and getting into better shape, that I should join this organization called CIBA and that maybe I could even ride a century ride if I kept up the good work!” Her eyes again work their way upward and her smile melts into a thin line.

I press on: “And, Honey, they told me that if I wanted to ride a century ride—that’s a ride of a hundred miles in a single day, dear—that I might want to invest in a road bike and some other gear.” At this point her arms are crossed and any semblance of a smile has left her lovely face. She glances back into the garage at my abandoned clearance rack bike and then down at my spiffy new hybrid bike and she very calmly asks: “How many miles did you ride on your *new* bike today, dear?” I respond enthusiastically “Fifty miles, honey! Can you believe it? One hundred miles is just around the corner if I buy a road bike!” She looked directly into my eyes and said “You rode fifty miles on that bike today. You want to ride one hundred miles? Ride fifty twice!!” She stomped into the house and left me with my thoughts.

Being a glutton for punishment, later that evening, I broached the topic with her again. We were sitting on the deck enjoying a beautiful sunset when I said “You know, dear, a road bike would be an investment in my health; and there’s a lot of heart disease in my family; and I *really* am enjoying riding a bike more than any other exercise I’ve every done.” She didn’t respond for the longest time and then suddenly she asked “So, about how much will a road bike cost?” Encouraged, I said “Well, for about a thousand dollars or so...” Her eyes popped out of her head a little. I continued sheepishly: “That would probably buy one that would do about anything I really need it to do.” She then started grinning and staring at my old pickup truck in the back yard.

Now I have to tell you that I loved this pickup truck. My grandfather bought it new in 1979. It had four-wheel drive and when I was a kid on the farm, I used this truck to learn to drive. Although it was a little beat up and pretty rusty, I truly loved this truck. She, however, hated this truck and took regular opportunities to remind me how much more lovely our landscaping would have looked without my beloved eyesore in the yard.

Her grin fades a little while I blather on about “the health benefits of a road bike” and how “doing more than 50 miles on my hybrid is really asking a lot of the bike, not to mention me”. She interrupts me and simply asks: “How much did you say a road bike would cost again?” I answer “Well, maybe just a little less than a thousand dollars.” She then asks “And how much do you figure that truck is worth?”

Fast forward a week: The wind is in my hair as I ride down a hill and into my grandfather’s driveway. He and my Granny are in their new pickup truck heading to town when I pull up next to them with a big grin on my face. My grandpa looks at me and says “Wade-boy! Is that a new bicycle you’re riding there?” I flashed him a toothy smile and answered “Why, Papaw. What’s wrong with you? This isn’t a bicycle at all. It may look like a bicycle, but it’s not. It’s a 1979 pickup truck!”

I rode my first century eight weeks later.

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Wade Winger, the author of “The Skinny on Cycling” is the father of one adorable little girl, the husband of a beautiful & talented librarian, a Yogi and an avid cyclist. His web site, www.HowILost100Pounds.com features common sense advice on losing weight without suffering and improving your cycling through healthy living.