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Seasonal Cycling Tips

New Bike on the Block

My Favourite
Cycling Street

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Issue 8



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Foreword

Keep warm, keep cycling...

It wasn't until I visited the Isle of Mull that I really understood British weather. It was the middle of summer, the sun was shining, the barbecue on the beach was glowing, and then out of the blue the rain came – like someone had dropped the whole of the Atlantic on our heads.



They hadn't, of course. The Atlantic was all around us – and that was the problem. Not only does Mull have the geographical shape of a mini-Britain, the weather there is a microcosm of the mainland's. That day, I learned a valuable lesson. Britain is *in the sea*. Get used to being rained on.

So, when it came to cycling this summer, I wasn't worried about the rain, and I won't be worried about bad weather this winter. Preparedness is essential, but liberating too. I now carry with me on my bike a breathable waterproof jacket and overtrousers, together weighing hardly anything. If the London sky does a Mull, I'll quickly cover up and carry on, unbothered.

The same goes for cold or snowy weather. I'll wrap up well before I set off, and wear gloves and a hat to keep my extremities cosy. And when I start pedalling, I'll feel an inner glow, as though I had a little heater installed under my jumper.

The point is, when people say "in winter, the weather's too bad for cycling", they've got it back to front. In winter, cyclists who come prepared tend to be warmer and drier than most. All other transport users, at some point, must confront bad weather – between the car door and the final destination, or between the front door and the station. Usually they do so without adequate preparation, and end up miserable.

Well-prepared cyclists, in contrast, can sit back and enjoy an experience unthinkable to everyone else: the beauty of bad weather. Imperious skies, jet black rivers running through the streets, snowflakes landing on the end of your nose.

In this issue of Cycle Lifestyle you'll find information, tips and encouragement to help you prepare for cycling whatever the weather. Get ready to encounter your city in a new and exciting way.

Ben Irvine

Ben Irvine,

author of *Einstein and the Art of Mindful Cycling*
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poem

Bicycle wheel chorus

(production line,
Taichung factory,
Taiwan)

by Emma Harding

We spin a finite road in air,
in tungsten no-scape, not
the gravel, grass we long for.

On this vast production line,
clamped, upended, serried,
we are all contradiction –

purposeful and pointless,
static but in motion, each axle
singing of the wet tarmac hiss.

Random siblings are shucked
from the line to be drum-roll
tested, weight-laden, ducked

in salt-water, exposed to sun –
we whisper their fate along
the row, until a vast machine

stops our mouths with spokes.
Righted, we're primed for
each point west, the tar tracks

on which we'll balance all,
bear those dreaming bipeds
to the crest of a heart-leap hill.

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A Balanced Mind

Excerpt from *Einstein & the Art of Mindful Cycling*, by Ben Irvine

If I tell you that riding a bicycle can make you think like Albert Einstein, you probably won't believe me. Einstein was one of history's greatest scientists. Riding a bike is as easy as – well, riding a bike. What if I remind you of the famous photograph of Einstein cheerfully pedalling along? You might wonder whether wearing trousers that are too short or a buttoned-up cardigan can make you any more like this enigmatic genius than cycling ever could.

'I thought of that while riding my bicycle'

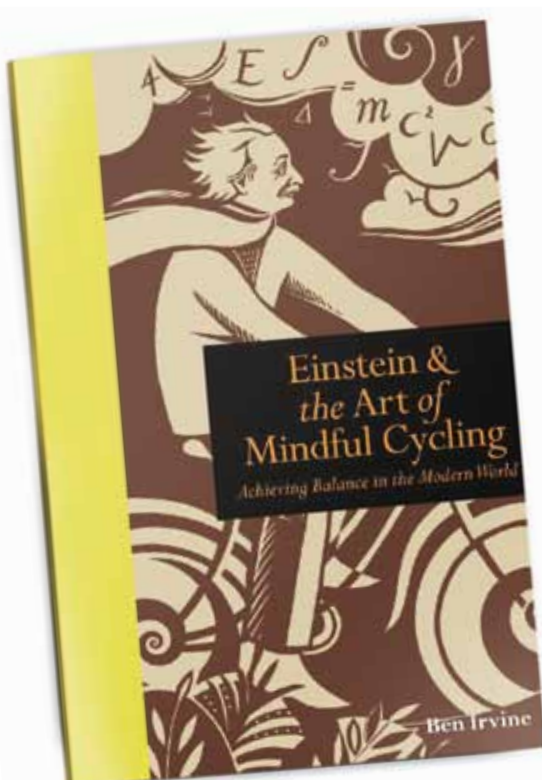
– Albert Einstein (1879-1955) on his theory of relativity

Einstein was a rebel (or a 'lazy dog', as one of his college professors put it), and took nine years to get an academic job after graduating – yet in one legendary 'miracle year', while working as a patent clerk in 1905, he published four astonishing papers that revolutionized physics. He was a committed believer in truth and the mathematical structure of reality – yet he declared that 'imagination is more important than knowledge', and loved to play the violin. He valued simple, homely pleasures, preferring to help local children with their homework over adopting the gaudy trappings of his success – yet he became a global celebrity, a self-styled world citizen, and an impassioned advocate of international government. He was a scatterbrain who often forgot to wear socks and eat lunch – yet he campaigned unflinchingly for democracy, racial equality and pacifism.

A socialist who championed freedom, a loner who cared deeply for humanity, a non-believer who saw the universe as God's handiwork – Einstein was *Time* magazine's 'person of the century', yet also the inspiration behind E.T. and Yoda. On his deathbed he was still scrawling equations.

The wonderful world of Einstein contains all this, and more. What a jumbled-up genius! Or so it can seem; but one man's jumble is another man's blend. Just as Einstein's theories spied unity in the diversity of nature, his own life was more coherent than a first glance suggests. The local and the global, the individual and the social, the creative and the practical – in Einstein's world each was perfectly harmonized. None was sacrificed for the others. His worldview was balanced. And that's why Einstein and cycling belong together.

Cycling can help us all achieve the same mindful balance that Einstein managed – between local, global, individual, social,



creative and practical ways of living. In the modern world it often seems as though we have to choose between each of these, but on a bicycle we don't, because cycling threads them all together, into a glorious feeling of wellbeing. Local sensibilities meet broad horizons, expansive freedoms meet friendly communities, buzzing imaginations meet useful skills.

Just as Einstein scaled intellectual peaks and saw previously unseen and wonderful patterns, the humble bicycle can help us rise above our hectic lives, shaping our views of the world and of one another for the better.

For a limited time, signed copies of *Einstein & the Art of Mindful Cycling: Achieving Balance in the Modern World* (Leaping Hare, 2012) are available from www.cyclelifestyle.co.uk

Give it a Go!

How I caught the cycling bug in just one week

by Rob Ogilvie

Glaswegian Rob Ogilvie lives in Holloway and works for a major bank in the City. Like many other Londoners, he started commuting by bike during the Olympics. Now, in his own words, he is "cycling everywhere"...

I have a habit of putting things off. I am 28 years old and I haven't yet learned to drive; it's taken me fully three months to get round to writing this article; and, perhaps worst of all, I've owned a government-sponsored 'Cycle to work' bike for the best part of two years without ever using it to commute to the office.* Then along came the Olympics. And whilst I'd like to say I was inspired by the feats of our great Olympians, it was more the fear of overstretched public transport and stiflingly hot Tube journeys that convinced me to finally use my bike for its stated purpose.

So there I was, on Monday morning, having done my best to flat-pack my suit into my rucksack, ready to brave the roads of London. I'll admit I was apprehensive about it all at first, having heard stories of near-misses and read a few too many accident reports on the BBC website, but needs must, and I was not getting the Northern Line all through the Olympics.

I'd not planned my route to work, other than having the general idea of heading due south towards the river and working it out from there. I was going to go for the age-old technique of "fitting in" with the crowd and trying to look like I knew what I was doing. To my surprise, this proved much easier than I thought – there are loads of cyclists in London and, at 8am, most are heading in the same direction towards the city centre. My own route, I discovered, is roughly 5 miles, complete with cycle lanes along the roads, allowing plenty of space to negotiate early morning traffic both quickly and safely.

By the end of the first week of cycling in, I'd caught the bug. I was no longer just cycling to work; I was cycling everywhere. I was cycling to the gym; to friends' houses in the evening; to the cinema – literally everywhere I went. And I was no longer trying to fit into this new world. I was now part of a two-wheeled community. I was a cyclist.

Over the next few weeks, I started to notice a few of the characters that make up this new world: the besuited Boris-biker, the fixed-wheel renegade who doesn't stop for anything, the wannabe-pro who will never clip out at lights no matter how long the wait...very different people, but all simply cyclists. So what am I? I'd go for: the envious hybrid-owner. My bike is a hybrid – a Boardman Team model – which gives me "the balance between a level of performance near that of a road-bike but also a more comfortable riding position". And I guess it does, but I can't help but look at road-bikers with jealousy.



"the besuited Boris-biker, the fixed-wheel renegade who doesn't stop for anything, the wannabe-pro... So what am I?"

Now that the Olympics have long since passed and the days are getting shorter (and colder), it's sometimes tempting to slip back into the old routine of Tube commuting, but the fact is that I've grown to love what started out as a necessity. Whether it's trying to work out a new route home, putting on an impromptu drag-race with fellow cyclists at the changing traffic lights, or just the feel-good factor from stretching your legs first thing in the morning, cycling is an invigorating start (and end) to the day. Every day and each cycle ride is different and I find myself arriving at work alert and full of energy, rather than slumping down at my desk and having a whinge about Tube delays. As an added bonus, I've gained an extra 15 minutes in bed in the morning – it's quicker for me to cycle to work than get the Tube – and I now have an extra £30 in my wallet each week from saved fares. I'm already saving it up for a new road bike...

*For HMRC purposes, this is unverifiable.

Winter Cycling Tips

- 1 Wear gloves, a hat and warm socks.** This will help keep your extremities cosy.
- 2 Carry a raincoat and overtrousers.** Store these in a pannier or rucksack and you'll be protected from the rain or snow if the weather takes you by surprise.
- 3 Layer up.** If you've got money, spend it on the base and outer layers. A base layer made of merino wool or similar will wick sweat away from your body, keeping you warmer. For the outer layer, a windproof gilet or jacket will do the same. Thermal tights or leg warmers are a good investment too.
- 4 Be safe, be seen.** Make sure you have some reflective aspects to your outer layer of clothing (which should be brightly coloured if possible) and/or wear reflective bands on your arms and legs. Your bike should have rear reflectors and pedal reflectors, and a front (white) and back (red) light. Check your lights before you set off, and make sure they are switched on in darkness or poor visibility weather conditions. In general, if you're in doubt, you're not visible enough!
- 5 Ride carefully.** In wet or wintry conditions, be especially alert to other road users and look further ahead to anticipate large puddles, slippery areas or other obstacles, so as to avoid having to make emergency manoeuvres. Stay straight, and avoid turning across man-hole covers or areas with lots of painted lines on the road; these surfaces become slippery in wet or wintry weather. Go easy on the front brake, by shifting a little more emphasis onto the rear brake; it's much easier to control a sliding rear wheel than a front one. When cornering, keep your weight on the outside by keeping your inside leg bent and your weight pushing down through your straight, outside leg. This has two benefits: bending your inside leg keeps the inside pedal high and away from the tarmac, while straightening your outside leg keeps your balance in the right place and maximises down-force from the tyres onto the road surface, giving your wheels a better grip.
- 6 Warm up properly.** Imagine that your muscles are strands made of blu-tac. Cold blu-tac doesn't stretch very well before it snaps, so take it easy for the first 15 minutes of your ride. Once you're warmed up you'll be able to put more effort in, and won't risk injury.
- 7 Keep on top of your bike maintenance.** It is always important to keep your bike running cleanly and smoothly, but even more so in winter. Regularly checking all the major components for wear and tear can help you to avoid problems while out and about. You don't want to be trudging home pushing a broken bike in bad weather.



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Imagine if you could cycle from anywhere to anywhere in London simply by following a trail of coloured signs and road markings.

Imagine if all these coloured cycle routes were shown clearly on a single London Cycle Map, just like the London Underground map.

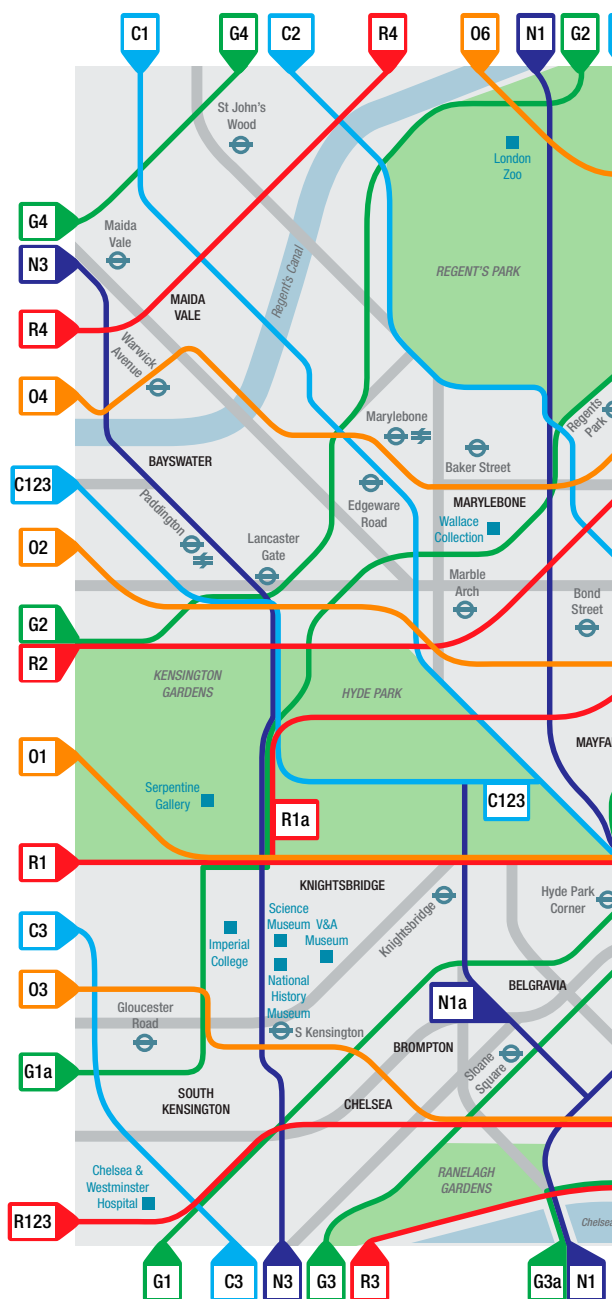
This is the goal of the London Cycle Map Campaign.

There are thousands of kilometres of cycle routes in London, like a huge tangle of spaghetti spread across the city. Hundreds of millions of pounds have been spent adding cycle lanes and other useful infrastructure improvements to these routes, many of which were developed as part of the London Cycle Network (LCN) project that began nearly 30 years ago. Its founding aim was to enable people of all ages and abilities to cycle throughout the capital on a comprehensive, joined-up network of quieter, safer streets.

And you can, in theory. In practice, it's a different story. Before you've even set off it can be hard to decide which route to take, because there is no simple map showing how the LCN links the capital together as a whole. Unless you're planning a short local ride, you'll need to unfold up to 14 different cycle maps covering London's different areas. Then, once you're on your way, you'll need to remember all the street names and directions – sometimes hundreds – for your journey because the signs on the LCN aren't regular or informative enough to allow you to follow them as you go along. All this can be a bit too off-putting for many would-be cyclists.

Simon Parker has come up with a brilliant proposal for making the LCN more accessible: the London Cycle Map. He has identified an incredible pattern in the capital's tangle of cycle routes. Like a magic eye, his map shows that within the complexity there's structure: a series of long, straight routes transecting London in all directions like waves, providing a direct connection between any two areas. Using Parker's map, you could cycle from virtually anywhere to anywhere in the capital, by remembering no more than a few coloured routes then simply following road signs and markings.

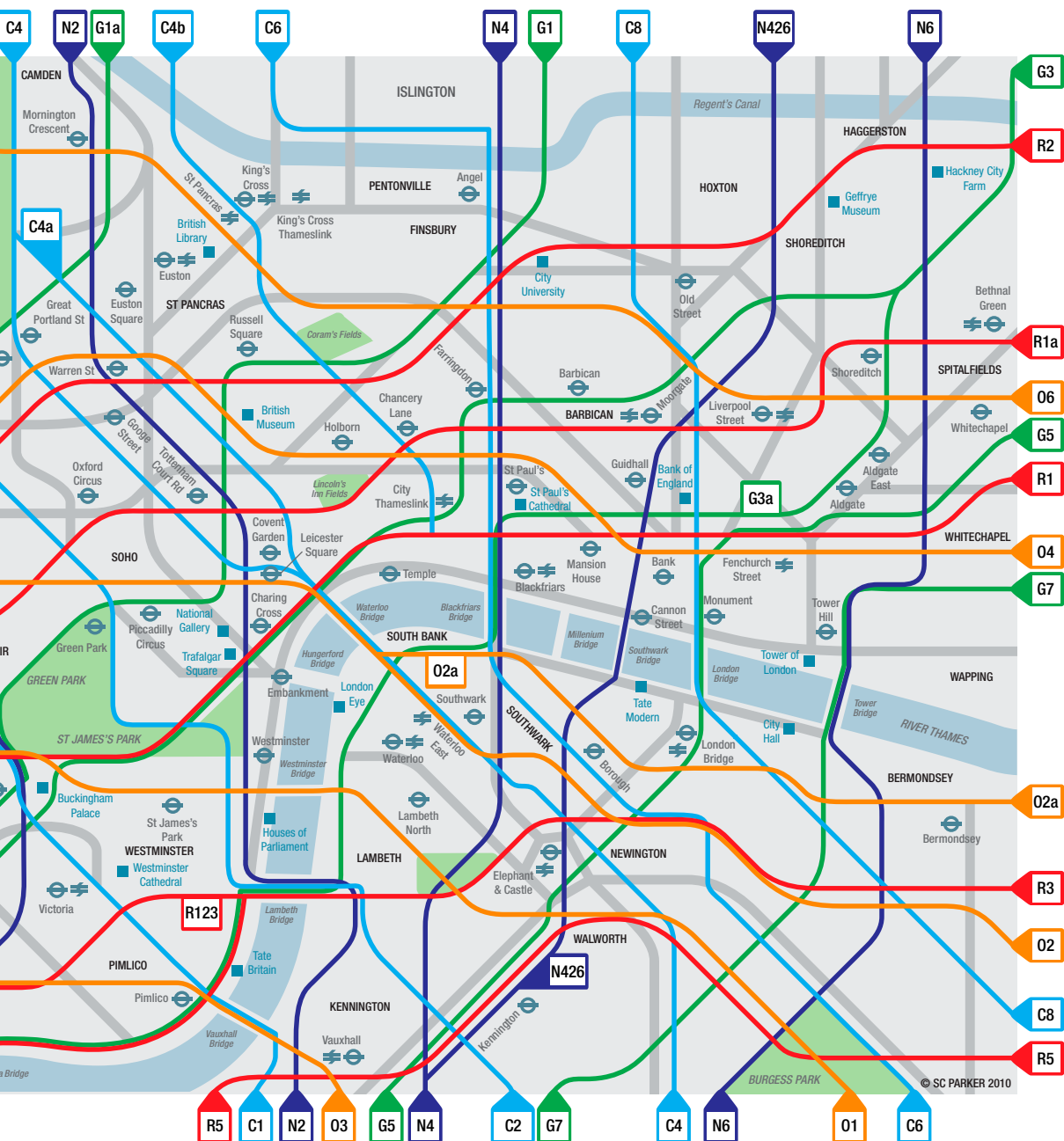
Well, you could if the signs and markings were put in place. The cost of doing so would be considerably less than that of the Cycle Superhighways and Cycle Hire schemes – it could be covered entirely by sponsorship – and the rewards would be immense. Potential, not just regular cyclists would soon know



they could confidently navigate beyond their local comfort zone. All Londoners, including the poorest, could get around the capital for free. Visitors could experience London close up, cycling on its beautiful, bustling and cosmopolitan streets.

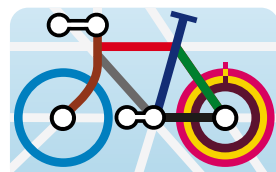
The novelist Victor Hugo once said: 'an invasion of armies can be resisted, but not an idea whose time has come'. The time has come for a London Cycle Map. Like all great ideas it needs support.

Sign the petition at www.petition.co.uk/london-cycle-map-campaign



We believe there should be a single 'London Cycle Map' that's clear and easy to use and corresponds to a unified network of signed cycle routes throughout Greater London: the cycling equivalent of the London Underground Map.

Find out more at www.cyclelifestyle.co.uk



London Cycle Map
Campaign

cyclelifestyle.co.uk

Be Prepared

Cycling is healthy, green, free, fast and fun – no wonder Londoners are adopting the cycle lifestyle in increasing numbers. If you want to be among them, here's our handy guide to getting started.

Choose a bike

There are different kinds of bike for different kinds of journey, so you need to choose the right bike for yours.

Road bikes ('racing' bikes) are designed to be lightweight, aerodynamic and fast, with handlebars that curl downwards and skinny tyres.

Touring bikes are sturdier versions of road bikes, designed for long distances carrying luggage.

Mountain bikes are designed for rough terrain, with knobbly tyres, strong frames, a wide selection of gears, and often suspension.

Hybrid bikes offer a compromise between the speed of a road bike and the strength and gearing of a mountain bike.

With smooth tyres and an upright riding posture that's good for visibility, they're a popular option for commuting.

Folding bikes can be folded away and carried like a briefcase. Useful for commuting, they can conveniently be taken on the train or bus. They have small wheels and fewer gears, and can be stored easily at home if you don't have much space.

Electric bikes are a more expensive option, with an electric motor offering assistance for getting up hills or on longer commutes.

Shed bikes are bikes that have been gathering cobwebs in your shed for years! Check them over before you get back on.

Then there are adapted cycles, tricycles, tandems, side-by-side cycles and recumbent cycles – making cycling accessible to almost everybody, including people with disabilities.

Check your bike

Before you set off you'll need to make sure your bike is safe to ride. Start with the following checks:

- ▶ Both brakes work well.
- ▶ Both tyres are pumped up (this will make your bike easier to ride as well as safer).
- ▶ The saddle height is correct (so that when sitting on the saddle your heel rests on the pedal with your knee very slightly bent). Also make sure that when adjusting the saddle height the seat post limit has not been reached (normally this is a marked band about 3 inches from the bottom of the seat post).
- ▶ The handlebars are tightened. Ensure that they cannot be turned with the front wheel between your legs, and that they do not move when pressure is applied from the top.
- ▶ The gears work smoothly.

If you are unsure then take your bike to the nearest bike shop for a quick service. When you buy your bike from a shop you can expect them to help you with these checks.

Get dressed

In decent weather there's no need to wear special clothing any more than there is for a walk to the shops. You can even cycle in smart clothes, so long as you're comfortable. Just make sure your clothing is neither too baggy (catching in the chain) nor too tight (restricting your pedalling). In winter, however, choosing the right clothes becomes more important. Above all, you'll need to make sure you're waterproof and visible (wearing light-coloured and reflective clothing). Check out our 'Winter Cycling' feature on page 7 for more information.



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Accessorize

Some basic accessories are essential:

- ▶ **Lights.** By law you must have a front white light and a rear red light when cycling at night, and a rear reflector and pedal reflectors at all times.
- ▶ **A lock.** Spend as much as you can afford to get a stronger lock (or indeed multiple locks). Always leave your bike in a well-lit and busy place to deter thieves.

Others accessories are really useful:

- ▶ **A bell.** You'll find pedestrians appreciate an early, gentle warning of your presence if you're on a shared path – a couple of tinkles when you're still 10 metres or so away works well.
- ▶ **Mudguards.** These will help keep splatters off your clothes.
- ▶ **A rack and panniers.** Panniers are bags that attach onto a rack at the back of your bike, which enable you to be unencumbered while riding. The next-best option is a rucksack because this keeps your arms free. Never dangle bags from your handlebars.
- ▶ **A pump and a spare inner tube or puncture repair kit.** Punctures are rare, but it's good to be prepared.
- ▶ **It's not compulsory to wear a helmet to cycle in London,** but many people choose to – especially in winter when the conditions can be more hazardous. If you do, ensure that your helmet is of good quality and properly fitted.

Plan your route

Preparing a good route is essential for cycling in London, but luckily it's one of the most fun parts. There are lots of helpful resources, including:

- ▶ **Transport for London cycle guides.** You can order them online at www.tfl.gov.uk.
- ▶ **LCN+ maps.** These can be viewed online at www.londoncyclenetwork.org.uk.
- ▶ **Local borough maps.** Contact your local council offices to find out more.
- ▶ **Google maps.** An especially useful resource which uses the Google map interface is www.bikehike.co.uk. You can interactively plot your route onscreen and find out gradient and distance data.
- ▶ **www.cyclestreets.net** – a journey planner for cycling which allows you to type in your start and end destination locations and suggests a route for you.
- ▶ **A good old-fashioned A to Z!**

When you plan your route you should aim for:

- ▶ Quiet roads or roads with cycle paths
- ▶ Low speed limit areas
- ▶ Parks and open spaces which allow cycling

And you should avoid:

- ▶ Very busy junctions
- ▶ Large and fast roundabouts
- ▶ Dual carriageways
- ▶ Routes heavy with lorries
- ▶ Pavements. It's illegal to cycle on the pavement, unless it's signed as a shared-use path for cyclists and pedestrians.

If any of these are unavoidable, you can always get off and push!

Stay safe – the Sustrans guide

Tips for cyclists on roads

- ▶ Ride in a position where you can see and be seen.
- ▶ Beware of vehicles turning left.
- ▶ Make eye contact with other road users, especially at junctions – then you know they've seen you.
- ▶ Signal clearly at all times.
- ▶ Follow the Highway Code – don't jump red lights and don't cycle on the pavement unless it's a designated cycle path.
- ▶ Consider wearing a helmet and bright clothing, especially in towns, at night and in bad weather.
- ▶ In wet weather watch your speed as surfaces may be slippery and it will take you longer to stop. Also avoid turning



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across man-hole covers or areas with lots of yellow/white lines on the road. The rain makes them especially slippery.

▶ Go easy on the front brake. In wintery conditions, try to shift a little more emphasis onto the rear brake by placing your body weight a little further back and squeezing the front lever more gently. It's much easier to control a sliding rear wheel than a front one.

▶ Consider getting some cycle training. All London's boroughs provide free or subsidised training.

Tips for motorists

▶ When turning left watch for cyclists coming up on your near side and don't cut them up.

▶ Give cyclists a wide berth when overtaking.

▶ Dip your headlights when approaching cyclists.

▶ In wet weather, allow cyclists extra room as surfaces may be slippery.

▶ Cyclists and motorists are equally entitled to use and share the same road space.

Tips for cyclists on shared-use paths

▶ Don't go too fast – it can intimidate others.

▶ Use your bell to let others know you are approaching, but don't assume they can hear or see you.

▶ Give way to others and always be prepared to slow down and stop if necessary. Remember to say 'thank you' if they let you pass.

▶ Keep left or on your side of any dividing line.

▶ Be careful at junctions, bends or entrances.

Tips for other path users

▶ Keep your dog under control.

▶ Keep to your side of any dividing line.

Find out more from Sustrans at www.sustrans.org.uk – or just phone a friend who cycles.

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Getting Mum and Dad to Cycle

by Gareth Jenkins



Like probably 99% of people, it was my parents who introduced me to cycling.

I remember my first bike: it was black, and had thick tyres, and stickers all over it that looked like buttons. I believed these were for the laser cannons on the front (I used to watch a lot of "Street Hawk"). I have no idea what make or model my bike was, but I would kill for an adult-sized version right now.



This beloved bike was given to me after I unsuccessfully tried my hand at skateboarding. I rolled down a hill on one of those thin plastic skateboards that preceded the proper wide American skateboards. As I picked up momentum, a doll's shoe got caught in the wheels and sent me hurtling forward. My hands broke my fall – as did my top lip, which developed a square moustache of scab that stayed for week and a half. I was known as "Adolf" at school for a while, because of that unfortunately placed scab moustache. Having to answer to Hitler for a week and a half took its toll on me; and so my Dad got me a bike to ease the pain (and keep me away from skateboards).

I eventually outgrew my bike and, playing a lot of sport, I stopped cycling for a couple of years. Then, one day, my Dad announced: "I'm going to get you a new bike" – completely out of the blue! What a result! It turns out this impromptu generous gift was the result of my Dad driving down a road in my town and seeing me and my friends go past. All of them were on bikes except me, who was sprinting top-whack behind them all. Feeling sorry for me, and touched that I'd never even asked him for a new bike, he vowed to buy me a good one.

I chose a Peugeot mountain bike with approximately 165 gears. It had a white and blue frame with reflective stickers on it. The handle bars were weirdly bent and the grips were made of black foam that came off in the grooves of your palms and between your fingers. I put some "spokey dokeys" on the spokes of the wheels, along with a ripped, crushed coke can which made a clacking noise when I pedalled. It was without question, officially, the coolest-looking bike in the world.

But that phase didn't last either. As you may know, I'm a "born again cyclist" – ever since Ben (the Editor) convinced me to start cycling to work a few years ago. I am now evangelical about the benefits of rediscovering your pedalling boots as

an adult. And because getting my first bike, and having my Mum and Dad teach me how to ride, was a big deal for me, I realised it would only be fair to try to repay the favour, by getting them to start cycling again.

The fitness, fun and freedom cycling gives you is just what my recently retired parents need. Since stopping work, they have found themselves with loads of extra time on their hands, and are sometimes stuck for things to do. I'm trying to crowbar cycling in there somewhere. But it hasn't been easy.

Mum has always been happiest when she's busy, and has used her extra time to get fit – I would guess she's fitter now than she has ever been. As a result, she was open to a bit of cycling at first. I even bought her a bike and took her to a car park where we did some cycling proficiency-style lessons.

(There was a very good reason for this. The first time we went out cycling together she hadn't ridden a bike for 50 years. I told her to brake, and on hearing this order she leapt straight off her bike onto the ground. "What are you doing? Are you alright?" I shouted. "I was just braking", she called back. It turns out her childhood bike didn't have brakes, so her instinct was to do what she'd done as a kid and just jump off. I had my work cut out.)

Dad's retirement plan is to not miss any sport on TV ever, which to be honest is quite an ambitious feat. He only leaves the house to visit friends in cafes, where he and Mum drink their own body weight in coffee.

Despite this, a while back I coaxed them both out to a beginners' Sky Ride. It went really well – my wife and I spent a lovely day with them, and we all had a good laugh.

So, you see, I was successful... for a while. But it's easy to slip back into lazier habits. My Mum's new bike, with its cute little basket on the front (and brakes), is mainly just gathering dust in the shed. And now the rugby season's started there's no hope of any encouragement from Dad. I haven't yet managed to convince them both that cycling is not "just for kids" or the "odd day out". I still have that debt of gratitude I feel the need to repay...

I can only think that I need to design and make two of the coolest-looking bikes in the world, so that my parents simply couldn't resist riding them. First things first: do they still sell spokey dokeys?

My Favourite Cycling Street

by Ben Irvine

When I was a kid I sometimes used to play football at the Douglas Eyre sports centre pitches. It always seemed so cold there – the ball used to sting hard – and the grass was covered with lumps of bird poo. I never knew why, but it added to the wild and remote feeling of the venue. Whenever I emerged from the front gates after the game, before heading left towards Walthamstow to catch the train, I used to glance to the right and wonder where that strange, windswept road – Coppermill Lane – led.

I didn't find out until I returned home after university. I had taken up cycling again, as a cheap and pleasant way of getting around, and planned a route from Woodford to Central London, heading past Douglas Eyre and into Stoke Newington, then down the Angel Canal.

The first time I rode along Coppermill Lane I was delighted, and the feeling has been the same every time since. Once you've passed the sports centre the view opens up. To the left are the waterworks – pools, pipes and concrete – like a scene from a spy film. To the right are the Walthamstow Reservoirs, spread out amongst the reeds and glistening beneath a big sky that wouldn't look out of place in Suffolk. London is suddenly silenced – apart from the occasional sound of a train chugging through the surrounding marshes, and geese screaming.

Coppermill Lane ultimately turns into a pathway which leads through Lee Valley Park then splits off to the right, passes the Springfield Marina to the left, and finally reaches a footbridge which crosses the lovely River Lee. On the far side is the boathouse of the Lea Rowing Club, and a little cafe with an outdoor area which always seems to be buzzing. Ahead is Spring Hill, leading up sharply into Stoke Newington.

Having grown up in the suburbs, I've always had a sense of where 'proper' London begins – where the pavements begin to heave, the traffic gets noisier, and the buildings rear up over the streets. Riding into Hackney via Coppermill Lane, via the peaceful beauty of the marshes and reservoirs, amplifies this sense of arriving downtown.

Yet the arrival is softened, too, by such a calm prelude – just as a deep breath brings a lasting mood of relaxation and contemplation. That's why Coppermill Lane encapsulates what I love most about cycling in London – that, on a bike, we can retain a sense of wonder amid the hustle and bustle.



The Peddler

A day in the life of a London cyclist

by Adam Copeland

The Olympics, the Tour de France, the US Open... Britain hasn't had a bigger summer of sport since your own correspondent claimed silver in the All-Suffolk under-9 short tennis Open.

That was Ipswich 1989 – this was London 2012. Historians will debate for years which was the more significant of the two, but one thing is clear: Britain is now officially Good at Cycling. Bradley Wiggins became the first ever Briton to win the Tour de France, and Team GB hoarded more gold than a pirate put in charge of the Cash 4 Gold post room.

As a London cyclist, the effect of all this has been clear – many more cyclists taking to the road (according to my painstaking research, bike numbers have shot up by approximately 'quite a lot' – and you can check my figures if you don't believe me).

Meanwhile, those of us already on the road have been affected in more subtle ways. Personally I've found it almost impossible not to think of myself as a competitor in a road race, or even a team member in the Tour de France (specifically the South East London stage).

The flyover on the Old Kent Road becomes a Pyrenean mountain pass. The woman on the Pashley Princess up ahead becomes a straggler from the break-away group, about to be hauled in by the hard-working peloton. And adoring fans have even daubed their hero's name on the road – assuming his name is either SLOW or LOOK RIGHT (presumably a misspelling of Sussex and England cricketer Luke Wright).

I've even been inspired by the cutting-edge research and technology. Just like the pro riders, I too battle the laws of physics in my quest for aerodynamic perfection. Mainly by tucking my trousers into my socks. Right in. In fact, if I'm feeling really sporty I'll even roll them up. It's a tip I ought to share with Bradley Wiggins, but I don't want to give him an unfair advantage.

This wasn't the only trick the Tour riders missed. Watching it this summer, I was struck by an almost total lack of Tony the Tiger spokes dokeys. What had these men been doing as boys? Hadn't any of them collected packets of Kellogg's Frosties? This seemed to me a gross oversight, but it was as nothing compared to the startling absence of Coco Pops bike reflectors.

Come on, chaps. You can do better than this. Frankly, it's no wonder Wiggins didn't even make the podium in Ipswich 1989.

*By a cosmic co-incidence, Adam and Gareth both mentioned spokeo dokeys. Or perhaps I am not their only paymaster (ed.)



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