

Finding the Right Bike

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I started Epic Bike and Sport to help people enjoy the sport of cycling. Finding the right bike is the first and most important step. I find no other bike shop conversation more enjoyable or rewarding.

The bicycle marketing machine has been in action for many years. Long gone are the days of the simple kid's bike or the "ten speed" you used to ride. Many manufacturer bicycle catalogs battle the phone book for size supremacy. Beneath all the fancy names and numbers is a very simple idea: each bike has an intended ride experience. The tough part is deciding what experience you want!

Here are a few thoughts to help you define your intended cycling experience

- Where will you ride? Some options include roads, paved trails, crushed rock paths, mountain bike trails.
- Who will you ride with and what types of bikes do they ride? Chances are you will be better off if you have a similar bike.
- How far will you typically ride? A bike made for a 5 mile ride is quite different from a bike you'll ride during a 50 mile charity ride.
- How fast will you typically ride?
- What are your long term goals? Is a triathlon or charity ride in your future?
- How much are you willing to spend?

Now, let's get shopping.

Find a good bike shop that is willing to take the time to ask questions, listen and help you find the right bike based on your desired riding experience. If the salesperson you encounter isn't attentive, helpful and a good listener it is best you look for a different shop. You are spending your hard earned money and you don't want to make a mistake buying the wrong bike.

After the initial conversations, the sales person should be able to show you two or three logical bike options for you to consider. These should be appropriate for your intended cycling experience.

As you look at the different options ask a few questions of your own. Which one has the best frame? Which one has the best wheels? Which one has the best components? What size is recommended for you? What type of service plan does the shop offer? Bikes need regular maintenance and shops will often provide initial tune-ups and adjustments for free. What bicycle fit services do they offer? You shouldn't buy a bike unless the shop will make sure that the saddle height and fore/aft are set appropriately for you.

Take the bikes for test rides. You cannot make a good decision without riding the bikes. Pay attention to how they shift and how smooth they ride. Most importantly, does it feel comfortable? Does your position on the bike feel too stretched or too cramped? Ride a couple of different size bikes so you know what feels best even if the sales person recommends a certain size bike.

Based on everything you've been through you are now ready to make your decision. Don't worry; you've done your homework.

Here is some additional information:

Always start with a budget in mind and buy the best bike you can find that fits your budget. Good bikes don't have to be expensive but there are significant differences between bikes just a few hundred dollars apart. If you have a \$1,000 budget don't buy that bargain bike you run across for \$599. The extra \$400 will likely get you better wheels, smoother shifting and a lighter weight bike – which translates to easier pedaling, more speed and a smoother ride.

Buy a bicycle from a local bike shop. Don't underestimate the value your local shop provides. The internet bargains or the low prices at the big box store are deceiving. Your local shop built each bike with your safety in mind, can help with warranty issues, offers free advice, provides local bike scene knowledge and makes sure your bike fits properly.

The skinnier the tire the faster the bike will roll. The width of the tire and the amount of tread will dictate the terrain you can ride. Skinny tires stay on pavement; wider tires with tread want the variety of dirt, rock and off road.

There are many different frame materials. You'll typically find aluminum, carbon, steel and titanium among others. Aluminum and steel will be prevalent on less expensive bikes. Carbon and titanium bikes cost more. Often your budget will dictate the material you choose. If your budget is under \$1000 you'll typically find an aluminum bike. Between \$1000 - \$2000 you'll find a mix of aluminum and carbon. Full carbon or full titanium bikes will occupy the \$2000+ levels.

Where will you ride? Will you stick to paved trails? Many popular trails, like the Katy Trail or the new Riverfront Trail, are made of crushed rock. Will you ride on streets? Do you want to ride the local mountain bike trails? A single bike may not be able to satisfy all your needs but it needs to be capable enough to handle the terrain you'll want to ride most.

Wheels are a very important part of a bike. They have a big impact on how smooth the bike rides, the durability of the bike and they make up a big part of the bikes overall weight.

Sign up for a maintenance class. Many shops, like Epic Bike and Sport, offer them free of charge. This will allow you to handle minor problems that might arise during a ride, like a flat tire or dropped chain.