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# How To Start Road Cycling [Again]

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[BikingToLive.com](http://BikingToLive.com)

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I wrote *How to Start Road Cycling [Again]* to give away for **free**. That doesn't mean you can claim it as your own though.

(If you do, I'll be forced to hunt you down.)

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(Sorry, gotta inform you of the legal stuff.)



### **Introduction - How To Start Cycling [Again]**

Have you ever wanted to start road cycling? You've watched great races on TV like the Giro de Italia or the Tour de France and think, "That looks like it could be fun."

Maybe you were a road cyclist at one time but had to give it up for any number of reasons - a stint in the military, getting married, college, kids, you name it.

Or maybe you're looking for something to help get you back into shape, get off medications, or lose a few pounds. Or a lot of pounds.

Whatever your reason, road cycling is a great sport to learn or take up again. It's low impact on the body, it's a great fitness and weight loss exercise, and, if you take up commuting by bike, a great way to save money and protect the environment.


### **My Story**

Like a lot of road cyclists, I started riding many years ago but I've always enjoyed riding bicycles ever since I was a kid. I got serious back in 1995 when I trained for a ride from Connecticut to Ohio to raise money for a children's hospital. I loved riding. I was in the US Navy back then and, at the time, had time to ride. That wouldn't last for long though.

Over the next ten years my military career took me all over. I moved many times, was deployed overseas several times, got married, had three beautiful girls, and went to college. It was a very busy time in my life and something had to suffer. That thing was my road cycling. Sound familiar?

I lugged my trusty Cannondale R300 around for years, keeping it indoors, in the hopes that I would have time to ride again. I tried to start again several times but could never find the time to do it consistently. That thing called 'Life' always got in the way.

I left the military in 2006 and it wasn't until 2008 that I decided to start cycling again. I missed it but the real reasons were more personal. I had gained a lot of weight and had lost my dad to heart-related medical issues. I didn't want to go to an early grave, like my dad, so I took up cycling again and launched BikingToLive.com.



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Starting road cycling isn't easy though. In fact, there's so much information out there it's easy to become overloaded and lost in the choices of bicycles, clothing, etiquette, maintenance, equipment, etc. That's why I wrote *How To Start Road Cycling [Again]*.

If you're new to road cycling, I've tried to put together some basic information that would be good to know as you get started in this great sport. Things like where to find a road bike, advantages of buying online or at a local bike shop, tips on how to change your own flat, and so on. If you've ridden in the past, and are looking to start again, I think you'll still find some good information that you may have forgotten.

*How To Start Road Cycling [Again]* isn't the answer to everything about road cycling. You're going to have questions about nutrition, motivation, training plans, tires, heart rate monitors, bicycle computers, etc. That's perfectly understandable as there are many others like you that have the same questions. The only advice I can give you is to ask those questions. I'm always available so email me at [bryan@bikingtolive.com](mailto:bryan@bikingtolive.com). If I don't know the answer I'll find someone who does. We both may learn something.

In the meantime, read this Ebook. Send me any questions you may have, read my blog, interact with my other readers or fans on my Facebook page, and start cycling.



### The Road Bike

Obviously, the bicycle is the most basic requirement of any cyclist. You can't get around it. You gotta have one. Does it have to be a \$10,000 machine? No. Can you get away with a \$200 bike from one of the big-box stores? Maybe. Your budget will determine what bike you'll be able to get but there are some things you can do to find a good road bike for a great price.


Let's take a look at the where you can find a road bike:

1. **The one in the garage.** Chances are, you may have a bicycle sitting in the garage. It probably hasn't been used in a while so it'll need a through inspection and maybe even an *overhaul* by a qualified bike mechanic.
2. **Buying used.** If you're short on cash, buying a used road bike is a good idea. Ebay and Craigslist are great places to start looking. It sometimes takes a lot of looking, and even more patience, but you can find some great deals. Just know going in what frame size you need. I'd also plan on spending an extra \$100 or so to have the bike overhauled and inspected by your local bike shop mechanic. You won't know how well the previous owner took care of the bike and it's better to be safe than sorry.

**Overhaul:** An inspection and service of all parts of the bike (brakes, cables, hubs, etc.).

*Tip: If you're having a hard time finding the bike you want on Craigslist, try posting a Want To Buy (WTB) ad describing what you're looking for. That's how I found my current road bike.*

3. **Buying online.** You can get drawn into a huge debate about whether or not you should buy locally or buy online. I'm not going to get into that argument because buying a road bike online is a legitimate option. The advantage of buying online is that you can usually get more bike for less money. In other words, you can get a bike with better components (derailleur, shifters, crankset) for a cheaper price than you can at your local store. What you don't get from the online store is the maintenance agreement you'll get from your local bike shop. If you do decide to buy online, you must know what size you need first. I would also recommend you pay your local bike shop to assist with the final assembly and proper fit.
4. **Buying locally.** There's something to be said for being able to walk into a brick-and-mortar store to shop for a bike. You can test ride as many bikes as you need to, there's store personnel available to assist you and answer questions, and you'll usually get some kind of service



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agreement (i.e., bike fit, free tune up after so many miles and/or discounts on accessories/parts). Not to mention the relationship you'll build with your local bike shop.

If you don't already have a road bike you'll be resorting to options 2, 3, or 4 above. There's really nothing that says you can't use any one of those options. Your budget and experience will go a long way in determining what you do. What's important is that your bicycle is safe and is the correct size. If not, your road cycling experience is likely to suffer.

***Tip:** If you have a friend that's an experienced road cyclist, ask them questions or take them with you to the local bike shop. They'll be a good sounding board and can help you make decisions.*

### Cycling Clothes


For the novice cyclist, and those who don't ride, there's a stigma surrounding the skin tight clothing seen on cyclists. Many feel embarrassed to ride in, let's face it, clothing that doesn't look too flattering on us. For those new cyclists that are already tall and lean they probably don't mind cycling clothing too much. Those of you, like me, who have a few pounds to lose, may not want to be seen in something that makes us look like a stuffed sausage. Cycling clothing has its purposes though. That includes keeping us cool on hot days, warm on cool days, providing padding in our delicate regions (you know where I'm talking about), and keeping us comfortable.

#### But what kind of clothing does a new cyclist need?

If you're just starting out in road cycling you're going to need to invest in a few articles of cycling clothing. They are:

- **Cycling shorts or bibs.** Personally, I prefer the comfort of bibs over regular shorts. Why? Normal cycling shorts have a tendency to roll down at the waist. The suspenders built into bibs don't have the problem and help keep the chamois (the padding on your rump) in place. Whichever you choose, though, you'll appreciate the padding. If you don't want to be seen wearing the skin tight shorts, or bibs, you could always wear some normal workout shorts over them until you get more comfortable. Another option is baggy padded cycling shorts that are normally worn by mountain bikers.
- **Cycling jersey.** In my opinion, you can get away without a cycling specific jersey. In fact, I have a couple of normal workout shirts that make great cycling jerseys (I got one from Walmart for \$5!). But, cycling jerseys have some important benefits. First off they have rear pockets. That may seem like something small but those pockets come in very handy by giving you a place to store a cell phone, identification, or food for those longer rides. Cycling jerseys also have a zipper down the front that come in vary lengths and let you open up the front of the jersey on those hot days so you can keep cool.
- **Cycling Shoes.** Do you absolutely need cycling shoes and clip-less pedals to start road cycling? No. Do they make the cycling experience, workout, and power transfer better? Absolutely. If you're brand new to cycling it'll take some getting used to having your shoes attached to the pedals. I recommend practicing clipping in and out on a patch of grass or someplace you can easily catch yourself. Even with

**Tip:** Use a Ziploc bag to keep your cell phone and ID dry.



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practice you'll have to pick yourself up at some point because you couldn't get unclipped in time. It happens to everyone.

- **Cycling Helmet.** I include the cycling helmet with the clothing category because you should put it on and wear it just like you do your other cycling clothing. That means every time you ride. You can easily get drawn into big debates with other cyclists about whether or not you should wear a helmet. I'm in the club that says you should wear one. It's the only protection you can provide for your noggin so why not take advantage of it? Current technology allows manufacturers to make cycling helmets that are light and provide cooling using air vents while still providing the protection you need. If you're one of those that still doesn't want to wear a helmet, be sure to check your local laws because you may be required to wear one.

### Good Cycling Clothing Can Be Expensive

If you've never shopped for cycling clothing before you may be in for a little surprise. Quality cycling clothing isn't cheap. Top-shelf bibs can easily set you back \$150-\$200. Jerseys a little less and shoes anywhere from \$60-\$400 depending on the technology. If you're smart with your shopping though you can find some great deals if you're watching your pennies (like I am).

- First off, you don't have to buy name-brand. Sure, some of the nicer clothing is name-brand but that doesn't mean you can't get by with clothing that isn't. At least until you can save enough cash to buy something nicer.
- Look for sales. I don't buy anything unless it's on sale. And if it's not on sale, and I'm buying locally, I'll ask for a discount. You'll be surprised at the number of local bike shops that will give you a discount just for asking.
- Buy online. That's not a popular option with the local bike shops but you can usually find better clothing prices online. Pay your local bike shop back by buying your expendables (tires, tubes, nutrition) from them.



### Cycling Equipment

Just like any other sport, cycling has its own set of equipment you'll need. In fact, it's easy to get caught up in what's available. Much of it though is way more than what the new cyclist needs. Fortunately, upgrading to nicer equipment is pretty simple to do as you increase in ability or need. But what does someone need if they're just starting road cycling or returning after a long layoff?

- **Water bottles.** You've got to have something to keep your water or sports drink in. There are all kinds but what you use is largely a matter of personal preference. I like the plastic of my water bottles to be relatively easy to squeeze because I don't want to fight for a drink of water. Hydration backpacks on road cyclists is usually considered taboo but if it works for you do it.
- **Lights.** Chances are you'll find yourself riding when extra lighting would go a long way in making you more visible to drivers or other riders. You should purchase both a rear light and a handlebar-mounted headlight. My rear light is red with three modes – two flashing and one steady. The headlight I use is white with flashing, hi and low beam settings.
- **Stocked seat bag.** A seat bag attaches to the underside of your saddle and is used to carry several pieces of equipment that will be handy in a pinch. They are:
  - Spare tube. It's always good to have an extra tube available to repair a flat or to give away to someone in need.
  - Patch kit. Self-adhesive patch kits are inexpensive and easily fit into a seat bag. If you don't have a new tube to use you'll have to patch the one with a hole to get home.
  - Tire irons. These aren't really made of iron. They do come in handy for getting your tire off the rim so you can replace/patch a punctured tube.
  - CO2 Inflator. If you don't have a frame pump, you'll need something to inflate your tube with. CO2 Inflators are easy to use and can inflate a road bike tire in about 5 seconds. I like to carry a couple of CO2 canisters.
  - Presta-Schrader Adapter. I don't carry this in my bag but leave it installed on one of my valve stems. It'll come in handy if you find yourself needing to get air from a service station.
  - Multi-tool. These come in all types but you'll need one that'll let you do some basic work while out on the road in the event something breaks.

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- Money. It comes in handy for a mid-ride snack break or has a boot for a cut tire. If your tire is cut the tube will try to poke out. Placing a dollar bill between the tube and tire (over the cut) will get you home.
- Rag. You'll want one to wipe the grime off your hands after messing with your tire or chain. Some wet wipes sealed in a Ziploc bag might be handy too.
- **Floor pump.** You'll need a floor pump to re-inflate your tires periodically. Just make sure it's one that'll reach the high pressures road bike tires are inflated to.

We could discuss cycling equipment until the cows come home but the list above will get you started and have you prepared to ride. If buying all that stuff for a seat bag has you a little concerned don't be. Several manufacturers sell a seat bag that has everything you need already in it.

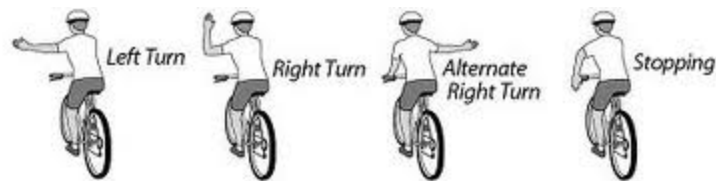
A word of advice though – just because you have the tools to repair a flat doesn't mean you know how. You're going to get a flat. We all do. When it happens to you you'll need to know how to fix it. Take the time to practice in the comfort of your garage so you're prepared when it happens 20 miles from home. If you have a buddy that rides have them show you how.

### Good Things to Know

Before heading off on your first ride there's a few things you may want to know. In fact, you'll want to know a lot but it'll take some experience to learn everything. In order to keep you safe and able to return home there are a couple of important things you need to know.

#### Hand Signals

If you're riding on the roads, either in the travel lane or a bike lane, you'll need to signal your intentions to the drivers, or other cyclists, that are out there. Why? First, it's common courtesy just like it would be when you're in your car and use your turn signal. Second, it's safe. By signaling, you give drivers the opportunity to slow down or yield to you. So, what are the common hand signals you need to know?



With the above picture, each of the signals is pretty self-explanatory. Personally, when signaling for a right turn, I use the straight-arm method like the third rider is showing.

When riding in a group, there are several other hand signals you can use to show you are slowing or stopping, to point out debris, or hazards like railroad tracks or potholes. I was very fortunate to hook-up with a cycling club that held training sessions to teach riders how to ride safely in group. They took the time to teach group riding signals and paceline skills. It's some of the best cycling training I've gotten.

#### Traffic Laws

If you're going to be out riding amongst traffic you need to know and abide by the laws just like the motorists have to. A lot of the bad reputation cyclists get is because motorists see riders breaking laws – rolling through stop signs, running red lights, not using signals, etc. Bicycle Advocacy is a huge topic right now and you can help out a lot just by riding within the law and being courteous to others out on the road.

### Tips For Changing a Flat Tire

I talked about this a few pages back so I thought it best to go ahead and give you some tips that will make changing that punctured tube much easier. Like I said though, have a buddy help you and practice doing it so you can change a tube with no problems. You don't want your first time to be 20 miles from home, in the rain, or dark.

1. **Be prepared.** If you're out riding with no way to repair your own flat then you're riding on borrowed time. If you're riding with friends you may be able to bum something off one of them but if you're all alone and 30 miles from nowhere then you're what I like to call 'screwed'. Being prepared starts with having the equipment needed to repair your own flat – patch kit, tube, tire levers, pump/CO2, etc. Most all of this can be easily carried in a seat bag as I discussed a couple pages ago. Having the right tools doesn't help if you've never used them though. Practice changing tubes while at home until you get the hang of it.
2. **Shift to the smallest cog if the flat is on the rear.** Putting the chain on the smallest cog on the cassette will make it much easier to remove and install the rear wheel. If you're not already in the smallest cog shift to it, pick up the rear wheel by grabbing your seat with one hand, grasp a pedal with your other hand, and roll the crank forward one or two revolutions. The chain will shift by itself.
3. **Inflate the tube a little before installing.** I recommend just putting in the new tube from your seat bag. Mess with patching the flattened tube at home. To help put the new tube in, put some air in it to force it to hold its shape as you install it. This will help keep the tube in place as you work the tube into the tire around the rim.
4. **Find small leaks with saliva.** If you're going to use a patch on the tube you've got to find the leak. If it's small it could be hard to locate and you could waste a lot of time putting air in the tube and then squeezing it while you try to listen for the leak. If you can find the general location by listening or using a reference point you can pinpoint the leak by moistening a couple of fingers with your saliva and rubbing it on the tube in the approximate location. The saliva will cover the hole and as air escapes will begin to bubble up. With the leak located you can now patch it. This is just like the soap bubble test when looking for leaks in natural gas and Freon lines.
5. **Inspect the tire.** If your flat was caused by a foreign object, there's a very good chance it could still be in your tire. Small pieces of glass are very bad about getting stuck in the tire and causing multiple flats because the rider never removed the glass. Use the reference point tip below to help locate the spot on the tire to look. You can also,



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carefully, run your fingers around the inside of the tube to see if you feel something sharp. The rag I recommended you stash in your seat bag is also good for doing this.

6. **Create a reference point using the tube stem and tire.** By creating a reference point you make it easier to find the hole in the tube if you have something sticking out of your tire such as a nail or piece of glass. If the culprit of the flat isn't obvious you can use the reference point to correlate the hole in the tube with a spot on the tire so you can check for small foreign objects like glass or thorns. To create this reference point, install the tube stem aligned with a specific spot on the tire like a logo, letter, color, or mark you've made.
7. **Inflate halfway first.** It's very easy to accidentally get the new/patched tube caught between the rim and tire when installing it. If you fully inflate the tube with it pinched like this you'll either pop the tube right away or shortly after you start riding. By inflating the tire halfway you give yourself an opportunity to see if the tube is pinched and correct it.

**Tip:** Replace any used items after your ride so your seat bag is ready to go the next time you head out.

### Start Out Slow

I believe one of the biggest reasons new cyclists quit riding is that they start out doing too much. That sounds contradictory because you start cycling so you can ride right? Right, but just don't overdo it in the beginning. Too many new cyclists think they can start out riding 10 or 20 miles right away. It's not until two or three days later that they start to feel the repercussions of submitting their rear end to that many miles that early. By starting riding hard like that they don't give their Ischial Tuberosity, commonly called the Sit Bones, time to get accustomed to sitting on the saddle. As a result, they get sore, chaffed and disgruntled about the whole cycling experience. And they quit. Instead, you should start out with low mileage and gradually increase it as your sit bones adjust.

### Tips, Tips, Tips

I'm going to continue the tips from last chapter and cover several different areas and provide some helpful tips.

#### Log Your Rides

Keeping track of your ride statistics gives you a sense of accomplishment and lets you know how you're doing. It'll give you insight into your fitness or weight loss. If you're following a specific training program, keeping track of your ride stats will be very important.

The simplest method is by using a paper notebook or computer spreadsheet program like Excel. The birth of Social Media though has seen the development of some great online social training logs. My favorite is <http://dailymile.com>. It's free, easy to post workouts, and keeps track of all kinds of data. You can even download data from some cycling computers to it. Daily Mile also integrates with Google Maps so you can map out your rides too. Here's my page on Daily Mile so you can send me a friend request:

<http://www.dailymile.com/people/bdewberry>

#### Set A Goal

I'm a firm believer in goals and think that we should have goal in mind for our riding. Whether it's to ride our first century, lose weight, or start racing our cycling needs to be done with a purpose.

#### Follow A Training Plan

This kind of follows along with Set A Goal above. If we have a goal in mind we can follow a training plan to help us reach that goal. If you're trying to lose weight there are plans for that. If you're trying to ride your first century there are plans for that. You name it, there's probably a training plan for it.

Some training plans will require the help of a coach while others can be followed on your own (like the century training plan from <http://www.bicycling.com/bicycling-get-downloads> that I did).



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### **Learn About Nutrition**

Nutrition plays a huge role in our cycling training. Whether we want to compete or lose weight, we have to know how our nutrition impacts us. There are lots of resources out there (including some at the link above) so there's plenty to get started with.

If you're looking for something to track how much you're eating, I'd recommend The Daily Plate from Livestrong.

<http://www.livestrong.com/thedailyplate/>

At The Daily Plate you can log how much you're eating each day, set goals for your caloric intake or weight loss, and track your progress.

### **Get A Bike Fit**

If you buy your bicycle brand new this should be included in the sale. If you buy used, your first stop should be a reputable bicycle shop that offers fitting services. Nothing will make you more comfortable on the bike than having the saddle height, saddle position, stem height, and handlebars dialed in to fit your body. If you're not comfortable, you won't want to ride so get it done. I recently performed an online Virtual Fit with <http://bicyclelab.com> and it's been a lifesaver.

### Thanks

To my wife and three daughters. You've put up with a lot and have always encouraged me in my cycling. Whether it was taking pictures for my bike fit, washing my nasty cycling clothes, picking up parts at the bike shop, or providing SAG support when I needed it. Thank you so much.

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