Spring Weather, Local Cyclists Warming Up

by Karl Gridley
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Once again it's that time of year when the thought of being outdoors seem to counter all notions of industry. From villages in the French Alps to towns on the Kansas prarie, people are pulling out their bicycles and planning rides through the newly greened countryside.

For many years the bicycle in the United States was considered not much more than a toy--something the kids could ride around on until they discovered the joys of the automobile. Today, however, there is a bicycling renaissance in this country; and people are buying ten-speeds in numbers only dreamed of a short decade ago.

Spurred by sky-high gasoline prices and an increasing awareness of personal health, the bicycle is achieving a status in the American life-style that rivals the role it plays in Europe.

Perhaps you are one who is all in favor of bicycling but are confronted continually with mechanical troubles that demand more patience than you have. If so, don't leave that bicycle sitting in the middle of the garage. The following hints may help get you rolling again.

Tires: Having lots of flats? Check to see if you've got geriatric tires. Is the rubber peeling off the sides? Is the tread worn off or the rubber hard as concrete? If so, invest in new tires with "gummed" sidewalls. You'll have fewer flats and a lot less headaches.

Derailleurs: Does the rear derailleur on your ten-speed constantly slip from cog to cog on the back wheel? If so, you probably need to tighten the shift levers on the bicycle's down tube or handlebar stem. You should be able to easily shift the chain into all cogs on the freewheel. If not, adjust the two screws on the rear derailleur until you are able to "reach" each cog without difficulty.

Brakes: If the brake pads on your brakes hang more than a quarter of an inch from the wheel rim on either side, they should be tightened for greater stopping efficiency. It would be wise to purchase a "third-hand tool" before attempting to make this adjustment. This tool holds the brake pads to the rim while you adjust the cable to the right length.

Seats: Like to ride but always end up with a sore rear or knees? More than likely the seat is poorly adjusted. The seat is at its correct height if you can pedal backwards with your heels on the pedals without your hips swaying. Most factory ten-speeds come with very poorly anatomically designed saddles. Though plastic padding looks comfortable, it is painfully deceptive. A firm saddle such as those make by Avocet or Brooks is well worth the investment for the discomfort it will alleviate.

Bearings: There are six separate sets of bearings in your bicycle: the front and rear hubs of the wheels; the two pedals; the bottom bracket (or crank); and the headset. If you hear grinding noises in any of these places, the bearings need to be overhauled. To do this, special tools are required, as well as a good supply of solvent and grease. Inquire at your local bicycle shop for the tools you will need.

If you desire further information on bicycle maintenance and repair, I recommend Richard's Bicycle Book (published by Ballentine) for expert advice. It is a well-written, illustrated, informative and funny book that is reasonably priced.

Once you've got your bicycle in top mechanical condition you'll find it a much greater pleasure to ride. If you haven't done a lot of riding before, be sure you don't over-do it. You can tear up your knees, hyperventilate or get severe leg cramps if you push yourself too hard. Stay in the low-to-medium gear range to start with, especially on the hills. It will be far better for your cardio-vascular system if you do more spinning in low gears than grinding in the high ones.

If you don't already have toe clips, get them. You will increase your pedaling efficiency by 40 percent, guaranteed. With them, your feet will stay in one place on the pedal instead of sliding all over, wasting energy. Don't worry about being helplessly strapped to your bike in a crash. You will become used to your toe clips in no time and able to pull out of them reflexively.

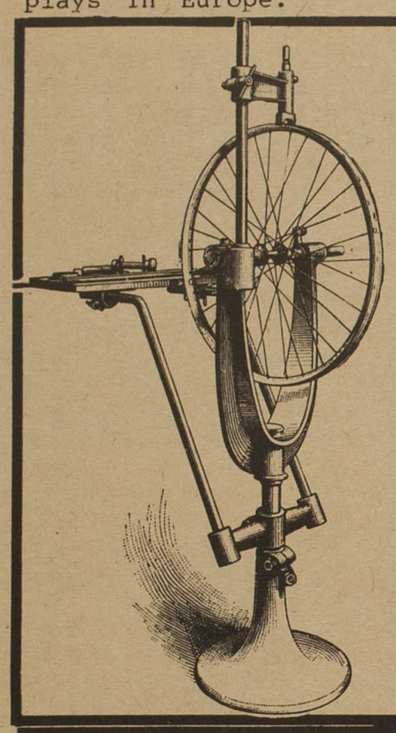
Always be sure that you have eaten enough to keep your energy up for the duration of the trip you have planned. Nothing is more agonizing than finding yourself 30 miles from town with all your calories spent. It is called "the bonk," and it can make an hour on a bicycle seem like a day. Guard against the bonk by storing quick-energy food such as granola or chocolate bars in your handlebar bag or day pack.

A water bottle also should be carried if you plan to ride more than ten miles--especially if we're slapped with a summer that sizzles like last year.

Now that you are all set up and eager to start pedaling, the Mt. Oread Bicycle Club hopes you will participate in the many tours taking place this spring and summer. Starting April 4, "Leisure Tours" will be leaving from the South Park gazebo each Saturday at 1 p.m. Distance usually will be from 10 to 15 miles, at an accommodating pace with an experienced tour leader.

For advanced riders, the "Sho and Go" tours depart the same place each Sunday at 1 p.m. The pace will be determined by those who show, and the ride will usually cover 40 to 60 miles.

On May 17, the club will sponsor a Century Tour, a 100-mile Tour of the Lakes. Participants will have the option of riding 25, 60 or 100 miles, with full sag vehicle service provided. For more information, call 864-3477.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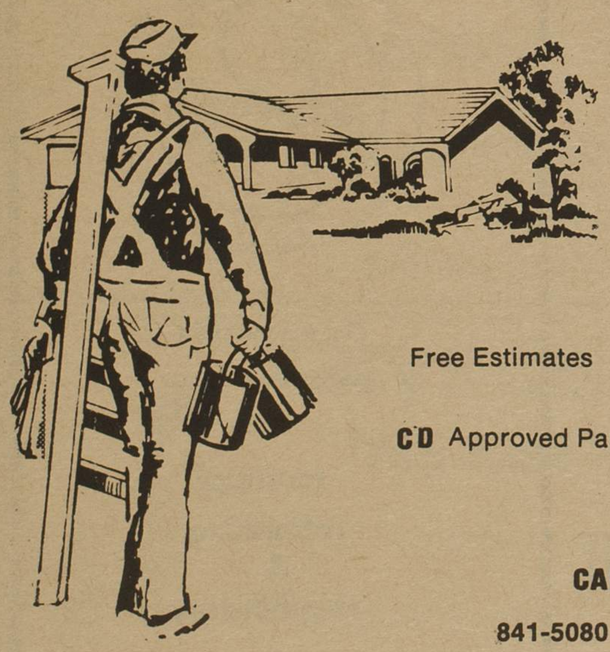
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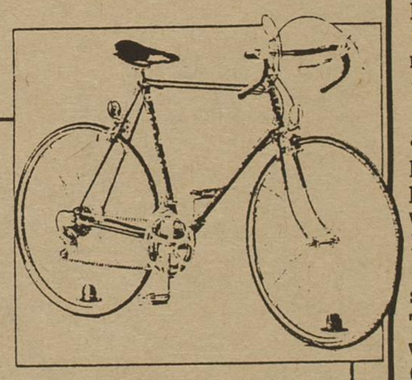
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