

**THE**  
**BALTIMORE**  
**BICYCLING**  
**MANUAL**

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## THE BALTIMORE BICYCLING MANUAL

by Stephen B. Thomas

### FOREWORD:

#### Goals of the Baltimore Bicycling Manual Project

There are a couple main points I've kept in mind while writing. These are as follows:

- Keep the habit affordable
- Keep the rider safe
- Go from point A to point B in a satisfying way
- Keep this manual appropriate for all ages

That's basically it. I don't want to make a be-all and end-all of bicycle manuals, a definitive bike repair and maintenance manual (as there are plenty of great ones out there), or an alpha-omega bicycling guide. Also, notice that I distinctly left fashion out of it, and I don't plan on commenting much on it other than the fact that I personally have the fashion sense of a warthog, and you don't want my advice in that topic anyway.

To be honest, I'm a bit perturbed by reading through bicycling magazines that advertise gear in a blatant marketing push (I reckon they had product samples they were supposed to put into the magazine somewhere). On the one hand, that's fine; everyone needs to make a buck, and it's worth it to learn about the gear that's out there that you may want to invest in. On the other hand, I don't know anyone who really wants to spend \$130 on a pair of bicycling shorts or \$125 on a bicycling shirt, or \$3,200 on a bicycle. Well...it would be nice to have a \$3,200 bicycle, but unless it's a gift, I don't think anyone I know will have one any time soon. Until that gift comes along, one still must ride. This manual will point you in the right direction to the most economically-viable equipment, clothing, and accessories here in Baltimore.

I know a lot of people who ride unsafely (which is actually a word). They routinely take chances whenever they put the fun between their legs. There is also some affordable equipment that can make one's ride—day or night, fair weather or foul—much more safe. This manual will touch on some of those topics, and recommend some ways to keep things less dangerous.

Finally, the point of riding a bicycle is different for lots of people: commuters; environmentalists; exercisers; messengers; delivery people; charity donors (donating their time and efforts on a fund-raising ride, for example); novelty-chasers; girlchasers; gearheads; feminists; the list goes on.

A bicycle can be useful to you in many ways. You may want to keep it clear to yourself why you want to be a bicycle rider; on the other hand, you may want to simply do it every once in a while, and figure it out as you go. The point is you will cultivate the habit of considering a bicycle as a transportation and/or recreational option more often.

### WHO AM I?

I'm a bicyclist—among other things—in Baltimore, Maryland, USA. Over the past few years, I've noticed many positive changes in terms of bicycling culture in this city. There are more bike lanes, there are city-wide bike tours, a bike-to-work commuter day sponsored by the city, and so on. At the same time, I see a lot of idiotic behaviour out there from my fellow bikers. I share my knowledge and insights in this manual to hopefully make rides for them cost-effective, safe, and enjoyable.



## **DON'T BE THAT GUY**

You know who I mean by “that guy”? I mean the guy I saw biking down the street a couple weeks ago. Here I am, my jaw dropped, watching some normal-appearing adult male:

--riding a child's bike, much too small for him;

--without a helmet;

--talking on a mobile phone;

--biking up the wrong side of the street!

Now, any one of those things can be considered a high-risk behaviour. Connect all four of those dots, and you're asking for trouble.

**Don't be *that* guy.**

## **CHEAP CLOTHES AND GEAR**

I ride in a variety of sections of the city (mostly northeast to central) at all hours of the day, and often quite late into the night. I need to be prepared for all manner of weather, since I bike all year round. Let me start off with some guidelines, then I'll deal with particular times for riding.

### *Goodwill Is Awesome*

This is a personal anecdote, but it's worth mentioning. With the exception of shoes, socks, and underwear (and perhaps the occasional band t-shirt), I purchase all of my clothes from Goodwill or some other second-hand store. Every single t-shirt, every pair of pants, every dress shirt I've bought in the past eight years—it's all been Goodwill or Salvation Army. There are several locations throughout Baltimore, and some I'm sure I've not visited yet.

Anywhere you can buy a completely new pair of pants for less than \$5 (sometimes, two pairs of pants for that price) is a place I want to go. Any rational human being will want to go there. So pay them a visit and you will be happy that you took the time out for it.

### *Riding In The Summer*

I'm not just talking about short rides around the block or so. I'm talking about long-distance rides during the hottest times of the year. Me personally, I hate humidity—which makes a hot day unbearable—and by the time late July/early August rolls around I often wonder why I stay in this town. It's like walking out the front door and immediately being wrapped in a hot, wet blanket. I hate it.

But I'm still on my bike. Albeit I am on my bike early in the morning and late in the evening, rushing from one centrally airconditioned building to the next. I do a couple things to keep riding well during this kind of weather.

--*drink plenty of water.* This may seem elementary to many of you, but we often forget just how important water is to so many functions of our body and mind. Drink water before, during and after your ride. There are folks who say you should drink enough fluids to weigh

the same after your ride as you did before it, but I've heard plenty of evidence against that. For one, not every ounce you lose is water weight; also, you don't metabolize fluids so quickly. So it's okay to weigh less, but keep your fluid intake steady and periodic throughout long-distance rides.

PERSONALLY, I have a Camelbak with about a liter-and-a-half capacity. It does the trick. For day-long rides, I also add a little something with a pucker to it: lemon juice, apple cider vinegar, or even cayenne pepper (everyone thinks I'm weird because of that, but try it). I do this to make my mouth naturally water, which makes me drink less at once. Soldiers do the same thing with those starlight peppermints when they're in survival training: if your mouth waters, you feel less thirsty.

--*wear plastic shorts.* And no, I don't mean like a warm up suit. Remember how I mentioned nearly everything I buy is from Goodwill? Well, I buy polyester-blend trousers (I normally call them “old man pants”) and turn them into shorts. Not only do you have a neatly-patterned pair of shorts to wear, but they are affordable, they dry quickly, and they still have pockets in them. You'll have to sew/hem them up to make them suitable, but it's worth it...and you won't have to purchase any of those super-expensive, unflattering spandex shorts.



## **RIDING IN THE RAIN OR OTHER INCLEMENT WEATHER**

It will eventually happen. You're going to be caught in the rain. If you head out for a day of bicycling, and you have a hunch that rain is on the way, here are some suggestions on what to do so you're not caught completely flat-footed.

--*rain gear.* You will become wet, but you don't have to be soaked to the bone. A raincoat, one of those thin vinyl ponchos, or even a thoroughly-customized garbage bag can all reduce your exposure to the elements. One great thing I found to work great in rainy and

cold weather is a balaclava: a tight-fitting cowl that blocks the wind but still allows you to hear and see around you. Balaclavas come highly recommended for bicyclists.

--*fenders*. This is one thing I've always looked into, but never followed through with. Add a fender to your rear wheel so that you don't have that silly-looking stripe of road grime and water up your back. Put one on your front wheel to prevent water from below splashing you in the face. My fender of choice: a City Paper strapped to my rear wheel's bike rack.

--*lights*. You might be able to see fine. But the lights aren't necessarily for you. It's for those motorists driving their cars. Also, I'm fairly sure Maryland law requires that for night bicycling you have a red light behind you and a white light in front. Again, this is chiefly to make yourself known to motorists, though lights definitely help you at night, too.

--*wicking base layer*. If you're planning a longer ride during inclement weather, then keeping the water off your skin is a wise move. Wearing wool or synthetic fibers (those plastic pants come back again) next to your skin helps keep you wet less often.

During my first-ever solo, long-distance bike trip (the week prior to Memorial Day, 2008), it rained the entirety of day 2. It wasn't a torrential downpour at all, but it was a steady, gentle, constant rain. At the end of the day, my cotton shorts were soaked through, my flannel shirt was soaked through, and I was suffering from mild hypothermia. Had I worn some wool clothes, I most likely would have been in much better shape.

--*gloves*. I regularly use a pair of fingerless gloves whenever I ride, which give me more grip on the handlebars and offer me a handy kerchief whenever I want to wipe sweat from my brow. During rainy or especially in cold weather, I wear a thinner pair of insulated gloves underneath the fingerless gloves, which help fend off the windchill.

--*conservative bicycling*. : When in rain or snow, your bicycle—as well as the other vehicles on the road with you—respond slower. As a precaution, you yourself should ride slower, and brake earlier. People mention how late to work the weather made them while driving their cars; you can say the same thing about being on your bike and your morning commute. So don't rush.



### **ON WEARING HELMETS**

Of course, there's danger in falling. But taken into perspective, there's danger in everything you do. That's the obvious copout answer of course, for all risky behaviour. But that doesn't mean it's not true. So don't be afraid to use that excuse. Keep riding your bike.

Besides, you're wearing a helmet, right? Of course you're wearing a helmet. Only complete idiots will ride on the street without one.

Oh wait, I forgot...Helmets aren't cool. None of those hot messenger bike guys wear them. But I bet a few of those guys haven't thought very hard about the difference between a concussion, a coma, and death. They're most likely thinking,

*"Oh, it'll never happen to me."*

There's a lot of natural selection related to those who make such hasty decisions. My question to you is: why make an excuse to not wear your helmet? Wearing a helmet might not stop you from falling, or even being injured, but it's guaranteed to lessen any head injuries and nobody can suffer too many of those, regardless of how cool they are.

### **ESSENTIAL TOOLS**

So what should you bring with you when you bike through Charm City? Although I'm full of opinions, I asked a few fellow experienced bicyclists about what they consider the essential tools of the trade; here's an explanation.

#### **PATCH KIT**

This was a clear front-runner, unanimous amongst all respondents. Put simply, this is a set of patches—either glue-applied or self-adhesive—that are used to plug up holes in your tire inner tubes. Practical experience and countless testimonials indicate that punctured innertubes are by far the most common malady a city bicyclist will encounter. Here are the basics on how you use a patch kit:

→remove the tire from one side of the wheel rim. Tire levers can help with this; they're simply a non-sharp stick of some kind used to pry the tire up and over the rim's edge.

Work the lever all the way around the rim, so the wheel sits with the tire open on one side and you can see the innertube. RESIST THE URGE to use a flat-headed screwdriver for this, as it's also terribly easy to puncture the tube even more with one of these tools.

→pull the innertube out from the wheel. Be careful to gently remove the air stem from the hole in the wheel rim.

→find the hole in your tube. Take it out of the tire rim and attempt to blow up the tube with an air pump. You'll hear the air escaping the tube; if you're having a tough time determining where the hole is, you can dip the tube under water a section at a time.

→use your rough stuff (typically, this is a section of sandpaper) to add some texture to the area around the hole on the tube. I recommend you are aggressive with this; you need to allow the rubber cement a surface to grab onto, and tubes are usually very smooth. When the surface around the puncture appears rough, give it a few more good scrapes for good measure. This is an ESPECIALLY important step for adhesive patches.

→if you have a self-adhesive patch, then peel it from the paper backing and apply it to your tube, sticky side down. Hold the patch over the tube for a good five minutes or so.

*Incidentally*, I don't recommend self-adhesive patches. You would think they would save

time and cleanliness, but I've not found a satisfactory self-adhesive patch yet. I stopped buying them a few years ago, and have since returned to 'traditional' patch kits with cement included.

→if you have a patch and rubber cement, then cover the entire area of the hole with a large glob of cement (feel free to be generous with that stuff). **WAIT FOR FIVE MINUTES.** This is because patch glue works the same as rubber cement: the chemical bonding occurs once there's a dry skin on the glue surface.

→After you've waited a suitable amount of time, press the patch down on this area, making sure that the cement covers the entire area underneath the patch. If there's an edge of the patch that has no cement underneath, then squirt some more underneath the patch in that area, just to make sure it's all covered. Once done, press down on this area for a good five minutes. Be sure not to stick your hand to the tube with the extra cement!  
→after waiting for a bit with the patch being pressed onto the tube, test out your patch job by slowly inflating your tube. Closely observe the patch, and make sure no edges peel up and let air escape. Once the tube is inflated at about two-thirds the pressure you expect to use while the tube is in the tire, then you can consider it safe and the patch is on. If not, then apply more glue around the edge of the patch; if it's a self-adhesive patch, stick another one on the area of the first patch that doesn't seem to be doing the job.

*You may have more than one hole in your tube!* Double-check it at this step, and make sure that you've repaired everything that needs attention.

→replace the tube in the tire, making sure the air stem is in the proper place. Put your tire back on the wheel rim, making sure not to pinch any of the inner tube between the tire and the rim. Re-inflate the tube to the recommended pressure.

## AIR PUMP

Well, you don't want to patch up your flat tires and expect them to inflate themselves, now do you? An air pump will re-inflate your tires with precious, precious air.

### Valve Types

One thing worth mentioning now is the fact that there are two predominant types of air valves on inner tube stems with which you'll want to become familiar. There's Schrader (by far the most common), which is seen not just on bicycles but on most automobile tires as well. The Presta valve has a stem that is typically much longer, and has an unusual 'screw top' closure.

Both varieties use air pressure to help keep the valve sealed, but since their shapes are different you'll need to make sure you have the proper attachment for your type of inner tube stem. Once you've seen one type, you'll definitely learn when you're looking at the other type; they're clearly different from one another.

→**PLEASE NOTE:** In most cases, you will need a special adapter to make an air pump compatible with Presta valves.

## Pump Types

There's been a lot of advancement in perhaps the last 20 years or so with pump designs, and things are changing every once in a while.

By far I think the most interesting development is the design for a *collapsible pump*. This is a tube-like tool with an inflation valve on one end and a handle on the other. The handle often folds out, and you can pull it to fill the inner chamber with air; many have a telescoping tube assembly that fills with more air than you'd expect when first using it. These are great when you are on the road and don't want to carry your traditionally large foot- or hand-powered air pumps with you.

I don't normally recommend filling up at the gas station with their coin-op air compressors. For one thing, it very frequently costs money and you may not have correct change on you. They fill up with air very fast, and there's also the chance of blowing out your tube if you're not careful with the air pressure.

## LUBRICANT

You put this on your chain or other moving parts of your bike when they begin to squeak or not move so smoothly. Go ahead and be generous with it; there's no reason to be stingy with it, the excess will run off eventually, and besides at least you'll know that your bike parts are good and greased.

There are different types of lubes that one can use. For most riding, a typical bicycle lube works best; it's definitely appropriate for Baltimore's environment. If you end up riding though a lot of rain, or snow and slush in the colder parts of the year, be sure to check more frequently that your chain is lubed and your bike parts are moving without resistance.

For situations when you're constantly in the mud, rain, or snow, you may want to upgrade: go for a high-viscosity or long-distance bike lube, or even motor oil (motor oil attracts a lot more dirt and grime, however, so check for adequate lubrication frequently). Generally speaking, the more you ride, the more you want to address lubrication of your chain and other movable bike parts.

→Before applying any lube, make sure you wipe off your chain using a lint-free cloth like an old t-shirt you don't wear anymore. Flip your bike upside down or put it on a bike stand, hold the chain with one hand wrapped in the cloth, and slowly pedal until the chain has gone around two or more times. You'll be amazed at how much grime and gunk comes off the chain.

→To apply the lube, slowly crank your chain, and drip the lubricant onto the chain links as it passes along. Limit the amount of lube dripping onto nearby tires by covering the area with a rag. Once you think the entire chain is lubed up, crank it so the entire chain has spun around several times.

## ALLEN WRENCHES

Also known as “hex keys” or “those little things that come with Ikea furniture,” allen wrenches are essentially lengths of metal shaped so one end can be inserted into a hexagonal (six-sided) hole. These come in various sizes, and a close look at your bike will indicate that you can fit an allen wrench into all sorts of places. These locations include such illustrious locales as:

- the top tube, or “steering column” where your handlebars are located
- most brake systems, including calipers, brake pads, and even disc brake assemblies
- handlebar adjustment clips
- rear-mounted and handlebar-mounted racks and bags
- your derailleur, if you have one

Obviously, if you want to make any adjustments yourself to any of these areas, chances are you'll want to invest in a set of allen wrenches of various sizes. These tools are so commonly used that they've found their way into all sorts of “multi-tools,” “tri-tools,” and other gadgets. Look them up; you'll soon find a set that works best for you.

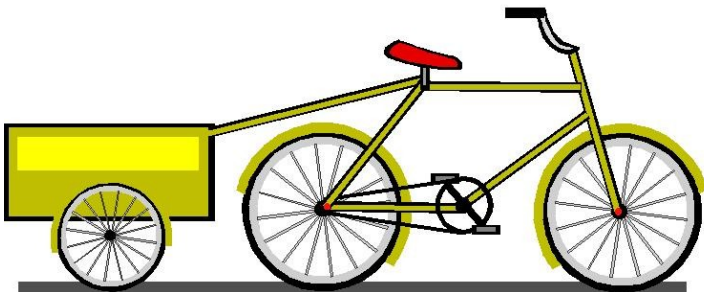
## BOX WRENCHES

These are the traditional wrenches that you think of when you think of the word “wrench”: a long metal handle with at least one end looking like the letter “C”, while the other end may be a loop of metal with several teeth inside. You use these to loosen and tighten axle bolts, brake bolts, or other fasteners on your bike.

I recommend (and it's recommended by my respondents) that you spend some time figuring out which sizes are on your bike in particular, and carry only those with you. It is also recommended that you don't resort to an adjustable wrench for these sorts of tasks; it's too easy to strip the parts. Leave adjustable wrenches to plumbers.

The most common sizes of box wrenches range from 8mm to 15mm; again, check with your bicycle to learn what sizes are required.

If you have all the tools listed above, you should be able to handle 90% of whatever goes wrong with your bike, mechanically speaking. They're resilient machines. At the very least, your repairs can buy you time until you can make it to a bike shop.



## BICYCLING IN BALTIMORE: IS IT SAFE?

There will always be a debate about this; I'm doubtful it will be ended with a any sort of clarity: with a solid “yes” or “no.” It's really a subjective question that each bicyclist needs to answer for themselves, and then decide to go from there: will I keep riding, or will I go back to automobiles?

**TRAFFIC.** For a long time, I thought the main threat to me while riding was the act of bicycling among moving automobiles and trucks. As recently as this past summer, a “ghost bike” monument has been positioned at a cross street in central Baltimore, in memory of a bicyclist run over by a box truck. “The driver probably didn't even see him,” is the general sentiment. And I'm certain every biker has a story or two about a “near miss,” or a close call with a car, truck, or storm grate.

So, what to do? How do you protect yourself from traffic and other road hazards? Here are some suggestions.

→**stay alert.** Always keep an eye out for anything moving. Oddly enough, you become more alert after each wipeout you have (see the section on “wipeouts,” p. xx). I also caution against ‘drunk biking.’ It impairs your senses, and if you couple that with drivers who may also have a few drinks in their system (like after last call), or drivers who simply are not paying attention, it's a hazardous situation.

→**make yourself visible.** If you ride in high-traffic areas, adopt a more upright posture so that more motorists and other cyclists can see you. Some folks affix an “antenna flag” on their bike, which sticks up an additional four feet or so. Make sure you have reflectors on your wheels and pedals; investing in reflective armbands or leg bands is probably a good idea.

→**If you must ride at night, have lights!** Not only do you need to see what's on the road in front of you, but motorists also need to see you coming.

→**wear a helmet.** There is simply no better protection against serious, life-threatening injury than a working helmet. And by “life-threatening,” I mean concussions, brain damage, coma, and death. I am convinced: you're seriously rolling the dice any time you ride a bicycle without a helmet. Please wear one each time you go riding.

→**make yourself heard.** Bikes are much, much quieter than any automobile. Having one of those “thumb flick” bells on your handlebars, riding with a whistle hanging around your neck (don't ride with it in your mouth), or simply shouting “Hey! Hey! Hey!” (my personal fave) may be adequate notice for motorists and other cyclists that you're coming through.

→**obey traffic signals.** ...Or at least slow down. There may be times when you don't want to pay attention to red lights (like when biking through sketchy blocks) or when you obviously don't need to (no traffic coming down the cross street). If your traffic lane has a red light, see if it's safe to move on. If so, then bike along the crosswalk like the sly devil you are, and zip over to the traffic lane again once you've crossed the street. I am not a

supporter of hopping off the bike and walking it across the street on the crosswalk for many reasons. And although the law says differently, consider stop signs as “strong suggestions” only, unless some cop is surveying the corner. Those signs were designed for vehicles much, much heavier and difficult to stop than any bicycle.

**CRIME.** Now that I consider myself an experienced bicyclist, traffic—which is a more or less predictable hazard—has taken a back seat to the reality of the streets of Baltimore. There never was, nor will there ever be, an equality between the have's and the have not's. Therefore, you may find yourself in some downright scary situations (with or without your bicycle). Yes, I'm talking about crime: muggings, robberies, assault, and other varieties of attacks on your person.

I could fill a legitimate book with all sorts of topics and discussions regarding the various reasons for the existence of crime, so I'll hold off for another day. But here, I will include some tips on how to minimize your exposure to assault and theft here.

→**keep moving.** As long as your bike is still moving, you can usually outrun anything on foot, even dogs. Secondly, you have nothing to prove by sticking around and confronting your assailant. If you can get away, you're in great shape.

→**occupy an entire lane.** I often do this at night, when it's possible for people to hop out from between parked cars or at intersections. This gives you more room to maneuver should trouble arise.

→**hang on to your bike lock.** If someone inches out into the street ahead of you and you have a hunch they're gonna try something, brandish your chain or U-bolt as if you'll swing back. Perhaps they'll back off.

→**carry pepper spray.** Although I've not needed to use it just yet, I've carried pepper spray for over a year now. Practice using this stuff before you need to use it; follow the instructions on the label. And for Pete's sake, don't stand downwind if you actually do spray it! Some brave souls take off their assailant's shoes and toss them away once the attacker is incapacitated. That takes some serious courage, if you ask me.

→**avoid night riding unless you really have a need to do it.** A lot more bad stuff happens under cover of darkness; minimize the opportunity for this bad stuff to happen to you. If you must ride at night, be sure to have lights on you, keep moving until you reach your destination, and navigate to only well-lit streets.

→**vary your routine trips.** Change either the physical path you take, or even the time of day you take, on frequent or routine trips (such as commuter routes).

→**women: conceal your gender.** Always wear a helmet. Consider wearing bulky jackets or other loose-fitting clothing. Be sure that these extra accouterments do not interfere with otherwise safe operation of your bicycle.

→**do not escalate a situation.** I'm not a proponent of violence, so I cannot support the notion of sticking around for a fight. And chances are you were singled out for an attack or heckling because it seemed to your attacker(s) that “you don't belong” for one reason or another. Assailants on a bad block are like cops in prison: if one can't take you out, two can; if two can't, three can. In prison, that's obvious, but on the streets there's no telling who's waiting around the corner. *Just flee*; you can end up in a lot of trouble very quickly if you stay in a hazardous situation. If you want to call the cops, then do it when you're out of harm's way—if only temporarily.

**STATE LAW REQUIREMENTS.** I had the good fortune of overhearing a casual conversation between a group of volunteers and a police officer not too long ago. The following is a summary, along with my comments.

**Helmets, age 16 and younger.** The officer answered “Everybody needs to wear a helmet.” Although I agree with him in principle, state law requires helmets for people age 16 and under, *not* legal adults. Someone please correct me if I'm wrong (I'll publish an addendum in the next version).

**Red light at rear, white light in front. A sound-making device, such as a bell or horn.** Again, this isn't so much for you as it is for other automobiles, bicyclists, and pedestrians.

**Enforcement.** By the officer's own admission (and this is where it becomes *very* interesting), these laws are very rarely enforced. The officer also mentioned that they'll often use these laws to stop “suspicious characters” (again, the officer's own words) and find out “where they live, why they're there,” and other information. The officer basically admitted to *profiling*, at which the volunteers simply nodded along. No comment on my part...

**Penalties.** Anyone stopped by police for not following these laws may be issued a citation if the officer is in a bad mood. On their own, these offenses will not result in arrests.



## LONG DISTANCE BICYCLING

So, you've rolled around Lake Montebello a few times, and now it's boring. You've biked around the nearest high school running tracks and parking lots more times than you can care to count. The trip to the corner store no longer seems challenging. You feel like it's time for you to turn it up a notch. How do you go about biking further and/or longer?

→**set mini-goals for yourself.** Set a goal to bike down to a landmark and back. Or even better...set a timer or keep an eye on the clock: bike as far away from home as you can for 15 minutes; the ride back will most likely take just as long.

→**combine rides with your errands.** Need to go to the grocery store, visit a friend for brunch, then stop by the post office? Why not try combining all three trips into one long series of bike rides? Just be sure to bring a bottle of water with you.

→**set a reward at the half-way point.** One of the things I've done that's worked quite well is biked myself to a meal: breakfast or dinner. I choose a destination that's an achievable distance (or takes an ever-more-increasing amount of time) and set that as my "mid-point." I bike to my destination, take care of my business, then I bike back home. This works for going out for a bite to eat, to see a movie, to visit parents, to going to work or volunteering...the possibilities are limited only by your creativity.

→**plan your first day trip.** My parents happen to live about 25 miles away. So one day I decided to visit Mum and my stepfather, hang out with them throughout the day, then bike back home. This works out great, as you combine more than one thing into the same task: practice bicycling, socialize, and wipe away that nagging guilt that you don't visit your parents enough.

→**recruit your friends.** This can be difficult, depending on how motivated (or lazy) your friends are. Ask them to come along with you via bicycle, and you can make a day's event out of it. It's always easier to establish and stick to a routine when more than one person is involved.

→**go for "the big one" once a year.** I finally worked up to (and worked my schedule out to) my first-ever solo bicycle trip in the Spring of 2008. I told all my friends I was heading out for "Bike Odyssey 2008" and close to the end of May I rode my bicycle about 165 miles in two and a half days. I planned the route myself, arranged a daily biking plan (how far I would travel each day), worked out lodging along the way, and practiced progressively longer rides leading up to the trip. I asked my friends for donations, announcing that, if I put off the trip or chickened out of it, I would give everything back to them (talk about an incentive!). I set out on Monday from Baltimore, and by Wednesday afternoon I was sitting on the breezy shore of the Atlantic in Ocean City, Maryland.

In 2009, I took two long trips. I participated in my first charity ride at the beginning of the Summer: 150 miles in 2 days. Since I already had all the equipment I needed, I just asked my friends to put forth a donation to the charity I supported, and it worked out great. At the

end of the summer, I biked over 170 miles into Pennsylvania for a weekend getaway, all on my own.

There will be times when it's rough, and you're hurting. You may want to stop for a break, or walk up the hill instead of bike up it. You may end up in the rain. But believe me (because I've done all those things), it's all a matter of putting one foot in front of the other (well, that and some solid planning). And, just like any other major accomplishment you've attained, when it's all been up to you and no one else, you can say, "Yeah, I did that." It's a feeling that can't be beat. I recommend it to everyone.



## ON WIPING OUT

One of the things I want to make clear to all readers is that in the grand scheme of things, it is okay to wipe out. Taking a spill off your bike is not always a bad thing. In fact, I'd go so far as to recommend the practice. Everyone should fall off their bike, at least once, while going about their usual ride.

When is the last time you learned something new by doing it perfectly the first time? That certainly will not happen very often in your life. Mistakes will be made, so to speak, even by us bicyclists. But you can always learn from mistakes. The trick is to make a long series of small, less-drastic mistakes than to make a very large one...The kind where you hurt

yourself badly.

I'm dancing around my main point here. But what I'm trying to make clear to you is that just because you fall from your bike doesn't mean that you're bad at it.

Even the most experienced, well-trained bicyclists, on controlled courses, fall from time to time. Of course, it's most often because they're doing something very risky at a high speed, like riding very close to others. However, I guarantee that they are more comfortable with the idea of taking such risks only because they've fallen and hurt themselves before.

→**falling, as i remember it.** After you fall, a couple things happen. First, you scramble as fast as you can out of any impending traffic. You grab yourself and your bike and your panniers and haul it all to the sidewalk. Then you take stock of your body and your injuries. It's actually not so easy because after you fall you're amped up on adrenaline, and maybe hyperventilating a bit.

Eventually—and this may come weeks or months later, after you've healed—you'll be at the point where you say, "Well, I'll never do that again!" And by that, I mean whatever it is that caused you to fall off your bicycle. You may even be approached by people who say things like, "So you're done riding, then?" Or "I bet you'll never ride one of those things again!" But don't listen to them; they're just jealous of your greatness. You defied death—and lived.

You gain an alertness that emerges not only when you're riding a bicycle, but whenever you're in the city. It's a hyperawareness that can't be adequately articulated. You become a bit more anxious when riding your bike, but that feeling soon dissipates. The interesting bit is, though, the hyper-awareness is still there, but the anxiety is not.

***Congratulations: you are now a better bicyclist!***



## **BUYING A BIKE**

"All right...You win, Steve! I'm interested in riding a bike! No more cars for me!"

So, I've just converted you to the wonders of bicycle riding in our fair city, have I? Well, you may be wondering what kind of bike to pick up. There are a couple criteria I'll outline for you: whether you want a *new* or a *used* bike, and whether you want one built for the *street* or the *trail*.

### **WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE: NEW OR USED?**

Well if you buy a new bicycle, be prepared for the following:

→**a price range starting around \$100 and going way up.** If you want to purchase a brand new bike, be prepared to spend more money. That goes for pretty much anything these days.

→**warranty/maintenance plans.** The great news about buying a new bicycle at a reputable bike shop (instead of some big-box department stores, which shall remain nameless) is that they'll almost always offer you a maintenance and/or repair program along with it. For those of you just starting out, this is highly-recommended. If your bike starts to fall apart on you for some reason, you can take it in to the shop and they'll sort things out for you. Need a 100-mile checkup? Roll on in, and they'll have a look at it.

And as long as you're not too annoying, you can ask your bike mechanic questions about how your bike works, so you can take care of it yourself next time.

→**better design.** By and large, there are many new developments and improvements that have taken place in the world of bicycle design, regardless of the type you purchase (well, perhaps with the exception of children's bicycles). Many features are built in to the newer bicycles, ranging from lighter frames, to index-shifters, to disc brakes, to artfully-designed crank wheels and pedals, and beyond. Please note that with more features added, the price will go up; again, this is pretty much like anything else out there these days.

You're going to cross paths with some bikers who prefer the "classic" designs, or they do uncommon things like ride only 25-year old Italian frame bicycles. That's their story, and they're sticking to it. Simply ask them for advice, learn why it is they prefer their particular type of ride, and factor their opinion into the choices you make.

If you choose to pick up a used bicycle, keep an eye out for these factors:

→**much more affordably priced than a new bike.** Whether you go to a yard sale, Craigslist, or your friendly neighbourhood bicycle collective, you're going to see bicycles that are much cheaper than what you'd see in a bike shop or department store. Note that this does not mean it's of lesser quality. As of this writing, you can find a suitable, working-condition used bicycle for \$80 easily, and even cheaper if you look around and are willing to do some minor maintenance.

→**varied levels of working condition.** You may need to deal with a "fixer-upper" if you look for a used bike. If you've ever been to a yard sale, you've most likely seen those bikes for \$50 or \$75 that Dad took out of the garage because the kids are done with college and he

needs room in there to put in his new tool bench. It's rusted, creaky, and shrouded in cobwebs.

This bicycle will need some tender loving care if you expect it to work well for you. Fortunately, it most often needs just a little lube in the right places, some air in the tires or a new inner tube, and a general tightening-up of the fasteners. I'm not going to say you won't be "inheriting someone else's problems," but generally speaking if their original owner thinks they're in unserviceable condition, used bikes are thrown away, not sold.

### I WANT A BIKE...WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS?



You'll most likely know a mountain bike when you see it: wide, knobby tires; a thick frame; shock absorbers on the front and rear wheels; obnoxious paint jobs. These bikes can take a LOT of abuse, and are designed to carry people through mud, water and all manner of Nature's Wrath, and still have you come out smiling on the other end.

Street bikes are very different: narrower and thinner-looking all around, whether it's the frame or the tires. They're very light, when compared to mountain/trail bikes. You'll also most likely be bent over and leaning forward on a street bike; this lessens the wind resistance the bike and rider put forth, enabling higher speeds with less effort. Some have unusual or uncommon braking systems, or no brakes at all (don't ask me; I don't ride 'em).



My personal preference? The "hybrid." It's a happy medium between the two above types, with the best features of each combined together for a pleasant, safe, and functional riding experience. Hybrid bicycles often have a medium-thickness frame (and weight); tires are wide, but not so knobby. They're appropriate for short, medium, and long-distance rides. You can really crank on them and build up an impressive speed, but you can still maintain control and stopping power.



In any case, I recommend speaking to a salesperson about your needs and for what you intend to use the bike. Are you commuting to and from work? Are you hitting the trail on weekends? Are you zipping around the streets of the city, making deliveries? As in all things, think about why you're using it, then narrow down your choices in terms of practicality for your purpose.

### TO PURCHASE A BICYCLE

I've included information about some of the local bicycle shops found here in Baltimore City and nearby. I've visited some, but those I've not visited recently come recommended by other bicyclists. Please note that your experience and mileage may vary, regardless of where you go.

The following are simply suggestions. The Baltimore Bicycling Manual is not supported, endorsed, or otherwise paid off by the following for advertising space.

#### **Baltimore Bike Works**

1813 Falls Road  
Baltimore, MD 21201  
410 605 0705  
<http://www.baltimorebicycleworks.com>

#### **Mt. Washington Cycles/Joe's Bike Shop**

*Original Location:*  
5813 Falls Rd  
Baltimore, MD, 21209  
410-323-2788

*Fell's Point Location:*  
723-B South Broadway  
Baltimore, MD 21231  
443-869-3435

<http://www.mtwashingtonbikes.com>

#### **Light Street Cycles**

1124 Light Street  
Baltimore, MD 21230  
410-685-2234  
<http://www.lightstcycles.com>

#### **Princeton Sports**

6239 Falls Road  
Baltimore, MD 21209  
410-828-1127

#### **Velocipede Bike Project**

4 W Lanvale St  
Baltimore MD 21203-4562  
<http://www.velocipedebikeproject.org>

### **Performance Bike Shop (Baltimore County)**

1991 E Joppa Rd

Perring Plaza Shopping Center

Baltimore, MD 21234

410-882-7770

<http://www.performancebike.com> (use the “store locator” to find local info)

### **Lutherville Bike Shop (Baltimore County)**

1544 York Road

Lutherville, MD 21093

(410)583-8734

<http://www.luthervillebikeshop.com>

### **BALTIMORE BICYCLING WEBSITES**

**(not necessarily an exhaustive list; I'm not responsible for content)**

#### **The Baltimore Bicycling Club**

<http://baltobikeclub.org>

#### **Baltimore City's Department of Planning Bicycle Master Plan**

[www.ci.baltimore.md.us/government/planning/bikeplan.php](http://www.ci.baltimore.md.us/government/planning/bikeplan.php)

#### **The North Baltimore Bike Brigade**

<http://nbbb.wordpress.com/>

#### **The Baltimore City Paper Bike Map**

<http://www.citypaper.com/news/bikes/map.asp>

#### **Cyclosity**

<http://blog.cyclosity.com/>

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