

...on your feet

# Ring Your bell

Don't get crowded by commuters: cycling is the only way to travel. 'Bring back spokie-dokies!' says **Rowena Milan**.



**T**hese days it seems we can't turn on the news without hearing stories of society's woes, be they traffic congestion, global warming or rising obesity. Many of us are looking for easy ways to be more environmentally friendly or health-conscious but find it difficult to get further than the initial thought. If this applies to you, then cycling could be just what you're looking for.

The humble bicycle is one of the most efficient machines ever invented – did you know that cycling is more efficient than any other method of transport including walking? There are so many reasons to get on your bike: not only is cycling one of the best forms of exercise there is, it's also an extremely green and cheap method of transport, an excellent way to satisfy your competitive streak, a relaxing weekend activity and even a route to an interesting holiday. Rebecca Charlton from SheCycles.com in London says: 'It's extremely liberating to be able to travel, exercise and socialise without having to pay a bus fare or gym fee. It's also great to escape the city for some more scenic riding on your days off'. Above all, cycling is fun, so if you're inspired to dust off your bicycle or take a first trip to the local bike shop, here's how to get started.

### First things first

Once you've decided to give cycling a go, you will of course require a bike. There are a huge variety of bikes around, from cheap 'mountain bikes' to specialised racing machines. The important thing is to be realistic – think carefully about what you want from the bike you are going to buy and then go to a good, well-established dealer for expert advice. It is worth buying the best bike you can afford and a good dealer should be able to provide you with a well set-up bike and even some free after-sales service.

Once you've chosen your bicycle, make sure you ask the shop to fit it with any extras you require. Lights are a must for all cyclists and you should also invest

in a good quality pump and bike lock. Depending on how you will be using your bicycle, you might also want to consider a bike rack and some panniers for carrying your belongings.

Finally, think about what you will wear when riding. It is a good idea to buy a helmet – make sure yours has good ventilation, fits snugly and covers as much of your temples as possible. Although you can cycle in almost any clothing, if you are going to be using your bike whatever the weather a good set of waterproofs, including over-trousers and shoes, will be invaluable.

### Time to ride

Once you've bought your equipment, it's time to get out there! If you're completely new to cycling, it's worth finding somewhere quiet where you can practise riding, braking and changing gear until you feel comfortable with your new bike. Once you've mastered the basics, the world is your oyster. Try using your bike to get to work, or start taking your bike on local errands. Longer trips at weekends with family or friends are one of the great pleasures of bike riding and allow you to be flexible – you can stop whenever you like and take things at your own pace. It's easy to find a cycling guide book for your area, so try exploring close to where you live. The National Cycle Network is also great for longer rides. Information about these routes can be found at [www.sustrans.org](http://www.sustrans.org).

You'll find there is loads of information out there about all aspects of cycling, from starting out to cycling holidays, so it's easy to cycle wherever you wish. Whether you just use your bike for daily trips or whether it becomes your new passion, you'll soon discover the enjoyment a simple bike ride can bring. Happy riding!

### Useful websites

[www.getcycling.info](http://www.getcycling.info)

[www.ctc.org.uk](http://www.ctc.org.uk)

[www.sustrans.org](http://www.sustrans.org)

[www.shecycles.com](http://www.shecycles.com)

