

Pedal pushers: The bicycle industry has variety to offer all types of cyclists

By E.T. Robbins / News Correspondent

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Aaron "Sonny" Harris, owner of Harris Cyclery in West Newton, says it's a wonderful time to buy bikes.

"What may have cost you \$600 to \$700 four to five years ago, you can now get for \$300. I liken it to computers. You can get more for your money now."

According to the National Sporting Goods Association, the number of people age 7 and up who participated in bicycling at least once in 2002 was 41.4 million. That's up 6.1 percent from 2001.

Of course, the first rainy weeks of summer may dampen these statistics for 2003. But Harris doesn't allow weekend washouts to get him or his customers down.

Harris has the lowdown on what's new and cool in bikes this season.

Wanting to educate those who've been away from biking, or who want to invest in new bikes, Harris explains that there are now four categories of bikes to choose from: hybrid, comfort, mountain and road.

A hybrid is a cross between a mountain and road bike and the comfort category is a spinoff of the hybrid with wider tires so it absorbs the shock of bumps and potholes better. Mountain and road bikes, as their names imply, are specifically designed for riding on mountain trails and roadways, respectively.

Harris says, "Basically with these bikes, you can go wherever you want."

And of course, there are subcategories to meet the needs and branding desires of manufacturers.

Harris eagerly points out Terry Precision Bikes designed specifically for women's bodies. Harris Cyclery is one of five Terry dealers in Massachusetts.

According to the Terry Bicycles Web site (www.terrybicycles.com), women have half the upper body strength of men. Most bikes have top tube lengths that are appropriate for men, but require a woman "to sustain more force in her shoulders."

Terry corrects the problem by creating a shorter top tube for women. According to Harris, Terry bicycles start at \$450.

Harris reminds customers about the importance of helmet safety — in fact, it is Massachusetts law that children 12 and under wear helmets when biking. He recommends Giro helmets, which come in one-size-fits-all for juniors and adults.

"In the past when you turned your head, your head went one way and the helmet went the other. This stays snug on your head." Prices start at \$34.95 and up.

Despite the weather, Jeff Johnston, manager of Milford Bicycles, says sales of higher-end mountain bikes are steady.

"Comfort bikes are more affected by the weather than the higher-end bikes because recreational riders are more affected by weather."

Johnston believes casual riders are more likely to stay inside during inclement conditions, whereas die-hard cyclists pedal no matter what.

For mountain biking enthusiasts, Johnston recommends Specialized Big Hits. As the name indicates, it can take on rough terrain with ease. Johnston notes, "It's a pretty radical bike."

Price tag: \$2,499.99.

Matt Donovan, manager of Dedham Bike and Leather, says he's seen a different demand from consumers than in previous years.

"There's been a big resurgence in road bikes and racing-style bikes."

Donovan says this resurgence may be weather-related as well; people are forced to the roads to avoid muddy, beat-up trails. He also notes that people who own mountain bikes may be ready for the next challenge — hitting the roads.

Donovan says the most popular brand of road bike he sells is Fuji, which offers models starting at \$400 but average \$650 to \$850.

Donovan adds that the rainy spring affected bike sales. Earlier in the season, people were buying new accessories, like helmets, and other smaller-ticket items, he said.

Donovan says riding gloves are one of those items that people invest in, adding that it's a subjective choice and all about comfort. Fox tends to be their most popular brand.

"We carry their whole line of clothes from shorts to shirts," says Donovan. Gloves start at \$22.

At Landry's Bicycles in Framingham, sales associate Rob St. Germain laughs while saying rain gear is quite popular this season.

"We actually just started carrying wet suits for triathlons, but everyone can use this gear now."

St. Germain says road bikes are a big draw at Landry's.

"Road bikes are real popular because of their ease of use. You don't have to go anywhere. Just out your front door."

Landry's carries Seven Cycles road and mountain bikes made of titanium and steel and are custom fit to the rider's body. Landry's, which has three other locations including Danvers, Easton and Westborough, is one of a handful of retailers (14 in all) authorized to sell "Sevens." Seven Cycles are manufactured in Watertown and sold all over the world.

Prices for Seven Cycles can range from \$1,995 (for a titanium frame) to \$7,500 for a complete bike. St. Germain says Landry's carries Seven's products that range in price from \$2,400 to \$4,500. In theory, the bike can last forever because of the heavy-duty material.

What's best to wear in this crazy weather? St. Germain recommends a neon yellow O2 cycling jacket.

"They're lightweight, waterproof, and they breathe so you don't feel like you're riding in a trash bag." Cost is \$80.

In addition, bikes and biking accessories are being tailor-made for the sexes, specific age groups and even the cars cyclists drive.

Johnston says bike racks designed with SUVs in mind, such as Thule hitch racks, are popular this season because they allow you to have access to the back of your vehicle and can carry up to four bikes, depending on the model. They range in price from \$150 to \$360.

What about when you want to take small children on a long bike ride? There's a product for these needs as well — "trailer bikes."

Harris notes that although trailer bikes have been around for 10 years, many people haven't heard about them because they either have been away from biking or haven't had children to worry about.

A trailer bike looks like a regular bike minus the front tire, and attaches to the back of a parent's bike. The child can pedal if he or she wants, or just hang out on the back. It's the perfect solution for young kids, especially 4- and 5-year-olds, who normally would get too tired to pedal for a 20-50 mile trek. Prices start at \$159.

Today, bikes and biking accessories are made with the consumer's needs in mind. Harris says this helps turn new customers into repeat customers.

"People can really be fitted comfortably with bikes. They think they'll go out with the kids on a ride once or twice, but they keep on doing it because they're really enjoying it. It's more comfortable than they remembered."

CYCLING RESOURCES

Bike Shops

Milford Bicycles
71 East Main Street
Milford, MA 01757
508-473-7955

Harris Cyclery
1353 Washington Street
West Newton, MA 02465
671-244-1040
www.harriscyclery.com

Landry's Bicycles
303 Worcester Rd
Framingham, MA 01701
508-875-5158
www.landrys.com

Dedham Bike and Leather
403 Washington Street
Dedham, MA 02026
www.dedhambike.com

Biking Organizations and Resources

- Charles River Wheelmen: www.crw.org
- The Massachusetts Bicycle Coalition: www.massbike.org

- Massachusetts State Parks: www.massparks.org

Industry Organizations

National Sporting Goods Association: www.nsga.com