

# Oregon's winter bicycle commuters face special set of problems

It was a dark and stormy Oregon winter night. The rain was pelting the pavement, and the wind was whipping the leaves into a frenzy.

There! In the distance, something was moving on the chilling landscape. It was a bicyclist. What was that crazy person doing out in weather like this?

He was probably struggling to reach his destination, whether it was work, school or home. Is a person really crazy to depend on a bicycle for transportation during Oregon's most difficult season?

Not if they're prepared.

Preparation for winter riding includes getting gear to protect the rider from the elements and maintaining the bicycle to protect it from early wear and tear.

These aren't the only worries for the winter bicyclist; safety is just as important. Regular cyclists must concern themselves with having the right winter equipment and maintaining it properly.

The first step is to make sure that you have all the legally required gear. A bicycle must have a headlight and a rear reflector if it is used at night. The fine in Oregon for not having these is \$40.

• **Lights:** These come in many different shapes and prices. Tiger Romanek of Second Nature Bicycles, 446 E. 13th Ave., recommends the environmentally friendly lights that run on a generator. They cost \$26.95 for a regular, and about \$39 for a halogen, which is brighter.

Another possibility is the halogen battery powered lights. They are convenient because they clip onto the handlebars and can be removed from the bike when you park. You can get a simple one for \$12 or spend \$200 for a really fancy light.

The lights usually run for about four or five hours on their AA batteries. You can buy a rechargeable battery pack for about \$50.

If you're worried about being visible, a smart buy is the Vista-Light, said Ray Bloesinger of Cycle-Bi Repairs and Cycles, 1340 Willamette St. They are a LED flashing light that calls attention to your presence. They can be mounted anywhere on your bicycle.

A horn is a good way to get a motorist's attention. Electronic horns that make a horrendous noise are now available, as well as the old fashioned kind. These start at \$19.95.

• **Helmet:** Another piece of equipment that is needed but not required. When buying a helmet you should look for the ANSI or



Photo by Jeff Paslay

Winter cycling means adding an extra layer of clothing and equipment to yourself and your bicycle.

SNELL rating before buying.

These companies test helmets for safety, and a helmet without their recommendation isn't worth buying, Bloesinger said. They range in price from \$32 to \$110. The more expensive ones have passed both companies' tests.

It is important to maintain your bicycle all year round, but it is especially important in the winter. The dirt and grime of daily use in bad weather can wear down a bicycle.

• **Maintenance:** Romanek said you should have your bicycle overhauled at least once a year. It is a good idea to have your bearing surfaces packed with waterproof grease when you do this.

At Second Nature this costs \$75 plus parts, but it is worth it, Romanek said, because it improves safety and lengthens

the life of your bicycle.

To prevent your bicycle from breaking down when you most need it you should oil the chain every couple of days, Bloesinger said. You can use a product called Tri-Flo or another bicycle friendly compound. Don't use WD-40 because it isn't a lubricant and it will eat away at your bicycle, Romanek said.

• **Tires:** It is important that your tires are in good shape for riding in the winter. The best tires for winter riding are knobby ones. They provide more traction on slippery roads and over those dangerous piles of leaves. But they won't make up for careless riding, Bloesinger said.

Bloesinger said you should check your tire pressure every week. The normal range for mountain bikes is 35 to 60, and road bicycles average 90 to 115.

The best wheel for winter rid-

ing is an aluminum one, Bloesinger said. Most bicycles are sold with aluminum wheels now because they are so much safer than steel ones. Bloesinger said an aluminum wheel is porous, so it provides a good surface for braking when your wheel is wet.

Steel wheels are very slippery when wet and the brake pads have trouble gripping them, so it can take four times as long to stop, Bloesinger said. To upgrade your wheels from steel to aluminum costs about \$95 for a pair.

If your wheels are wet it is a good idea to pump your brakes before you have to stop. This dries off the surface so the brake pads will grip.

• **Rain gear:** "Fenders are a must," said Eric Schuman of Blue Heron bicycles, 13th Avenue and Kincaid Street. Schuman said they will not only keep you drier and cleaner, but they will

also protect your bicycle from dirt and grime. You can buy a pair for \$18 to \$25 and install them yourself or pay an extra \$7 for installation.

It is impossible to be comfortable riding in Oregon without a rain suit. Don't be intimidated, not all of them cost an arm and a leg. They range from the really cheap plastic ones at G.I. Joe's to the high quality and expensive Gortex-like kind sold in bicycle shops.

Schuman said the plastic ones work well for short trips, but if you ride long distances in them you will sweat to death. A better option is a water-resistant suit. They are about \$60 for the coat and another \$60 for the pants.

The best gear, Schuman said, is the Gortex-like material. It is very expensive, costing about \$200 for a set.

• **Accessories:** They are so numerous they can be confusing, but there are a few out there that can make riding in the rain comfortable.

Those of you who have ridden your bicycle after it has been sitting in the rain know what it's like to sit on a wet seat. You've tried plastic bags, but they always leak. The best solution to this nagging problem is a water-resistant seat cover for only \$5.

Also available are helmet covers that cover up those holes that are great for ventilation in the summer but cause leaks in the winter. Romanek said it is a good idea to cover your face and ears on especially cold days.

You can buy a neck warmer that will pull up over your nose, or a face mask that covers your nose and allows you to breathe easily.

Finally, don't forget about one of the most important parts of cycling bodies — the feet. If your feet get wet on the way to work or class, you are cold all day.

Of course you can wear some those ugly rubber shoes, or you can buy some shoe covers for about \$28. They fit right over your shoes and zip up in back.

If you have toe clips on your pedals you can get toe clip covers, but they won't help if you have to ride through a puddle.

The most important element to being safe and comfortable on your bicycle is being smart. Don't ride too fast in wet weather. Leave yourself plenty of room to stop. Winter can be a dangerous time for bicyclists, so clear thinking is necessary.

If you have any questions about your bicycle's winter readiness just call your local bicycle shop, and the people there will be glad to help you.

—Tiffany O'Dell

## CYCLING

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Even if the club can put together a winning team, funds remain a problem. As of now, if the team wins Regionals, as it did last year, it would have no money to travel to the national competition, which will be

held in Boston.

The team hopes to raise money via fundraisers such as the Tour of Willamette and a mountain bike event in Oakridge.

The event in Oakridge is new for the cycling team, which generally focuses on road bikes. They were personally invited by the city council and mayor

of Oakridge to host the event.

The cycling season officially begins March 27 when the University team will compete in a collegiate road race at Washington State University. After that, the team will race almost every weekend until Regionals in May.

—Carrie Fenelon