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Road Bike Selection and Purchase 101

By Matt Russ

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Road bikes will range in price from \$500 to over \$5000, and vary greatly in design, materials, and performance. The first decision you need to make is road bike or tri set up. What type of riding are you going to be doing? Are you purchasing the bike for multi-sport competition or strictly for road riding, training, and / or racing? A tri bike is used in triathlons and other multi sport events, has aero bars and a more forward (less comfortable) position, can be slightly heavier than a road bike, and is generally less comfortable. The position puts your body more forward over the front wheel and has your torso almost parallel to the ground. The more forward position makes the bike less stable and harder to handle. On some tri handlebars your hands are far from the brakes, and the handling is quick and less controllable. I do not recommend this type of bike for beginner riders. You may sacrifice a bit of weight for aerodynamics, but unless you are moving pretty quickly, the aerodynamics will not pay off much... About 80% of your resistance while cycling comes from the air around you, but you must be moving above 20 mph to gain the full advantage. If you are a slower beginning cyclist the more aerodynamic position is not as much of a factor. I would start off with a road bike.

Second decision; recreation or competition? This is really more about your budget and how competitive you are. A \$500 road bike can actually be pretty reliable, but is heavier, requires more maintenance, is not as ergonomic, and the parts wear out faster. There is a trickle down in technology from top of the line road bikes, and an entry level bike can be of surprisingly good quality. Furthermore some entry level bikes can be easily upgraded to make them perform better. An example of an upgrade would be switching to a better wheel set, which perhaps will have the biggest effect on increased speed. Competition level bikes usually start at around \$1000. Competition level bikes usually start with a Shimano 105 component group or better. Shimano 105 has all the features of the more expensive groups (Ultegra and Durace), is fully race able and durable, but is a little heavier. Campagnolo also makes excellent bicycle components, but they are usually found on more expensive European models. I have had 105 bikes and full race Durace bikes. The differences are definitely there, but will not be significant to the newer rider. If you are just getting into the sport, an entry level bike may be good enough for you. But if you think you are going to stick with it, and want to be competitive, you should spend the extra money.

Third decision; frame type and material. I believe your best value is aluminum. Aluminum is extremely light, stiff, and relatively inexpensive compared with titanium and carbon fiber. Some complain that aluminum transmits road vibration more than other materials, but manufacturers have gotten much better with this. Carbon fiber is more expensive, but will dampen road vibration over long rides. Titanium is even more expensive, and is no longer the lightest most exotic material. If you buy a titanium frame you are buying a long term investment. I prefer the latest technology (I buy a bike every 2 years). Aluminum is going to give you the most bang for the buck. Manufacturers are starting to use a combination of aluminum and carbon fiber in their frame sets. Another consideration is geometry—compact or traditional. The industry has moved towards (sometimes) lighter compact frames. These frames have a sloping top tube and look smaller. Their advantage is quicker more precise handling, but you do not want to take your hands off the bars. The disadvantage can be that they often do not come in as many sizes, and can be more challenging to fit. My preference is a compact, but I am a

smaller rider and I find a good fit with these bikes.

New or used? Buying a new bike is like buying a new car. As soon as you drive it off the showroom you are out considerable money, but there is nothing like that new bike feel. If you are not handy, it is going to need regular maintenance (I recommend you learn the basics). Some shops offer a free lifetime maintenance policy. This is a good deal; a full adjustment can run \$40+ a pop. If you buy a used bike off of Ebay or from an individual, you may get a lot more bike for the money or you may get a piece of junk. If you want to pair the price down, go used, but don't go cheap. If you are not sure if you are going to stick with cycling this may be the way to go. Either way I highly recommend you get professionally sized, and that does not necessarily mean the sales guy at the shop. An expert will spend a good hour with you examining every aspect of the bikes fit (as many as ten different aspects).

I believe you get your best value with large manufacturers such as Giant, Trek, and Cannondale to name a few. The bikes are mass produced, but are generally very high quality and offer the highest component level for the price. Think of them as the Hondas'. The European models generally have more "panache" with custom colors and even custom fitting. The Porshes' can run up to \$8000 but are beautifully hand crafted works of art. A personal recommendation of mine; the Giant TCR2 which I think is one of the best bike values. I believe they are going for around \$1300. This puts a world class, extremely light bike in your hands for not a lot of money considering the weight and features. The fall is a great time to buy a bicycle because shops are clearing out the old models to make room for the next years and the Christmas rush. You are also going to need shoes, helmet, water bottle cages, computer, a good pump, flat kit, padded shorts, perhaps a rack, and tool kit. Be prepared, this is not a cheap sport even for the beginner, and there is an initial investment. You can find good prices online for accessories at Nashbar.com, Performancebike.com, or Sportsbasement.com.

Matt Russ has coached and trained athletes around the country and internationally. He currently holds licenses by USAT, USATF, and is an Expert level USAC coach. Matt has coached athletes for CTS (Carmicheal Training Systems), is an Ultrafit Associate. Visit www.thesportfactory.com for more information.

Beginners Guide When Looking To Buy a Pocket Bike

By Charles & Susan Truett

When looking to buy a pocket bike (miniature motorcycle) be sure to do your research. You need to find reliable sales professionals, dealers, or Internet connections to make this purchase. There are many 'knock-offs' or imitations out there and to purchase them would be a waste of your money and time. The parts for these imitations are not typically found and in the rare event that you can find them they will be extremely costly and are typically not guaranteed.

To assist you in making the best buy, talk to others that have already have a pocket bike such as a trusted friend or co-worker, your local pocket bike league, local dealers, etc. You can use the Internet to assist in you in your research as well. This will allow you a more time efficient method of comparing prices as well as obtaining information for various bikes. You will be able to compare the price of the actual bike as well as any amenities offered, allowing you to see which has the best offer.

Also note that when you buy a pocket bike, the laws vary from state to state and country to country. Speak with your local law enforcement agencies and local pocket bike league so that you understand all local rules, regulations, and laws. You are making an investment and it would be a waste of money as well as your time to lose such an extraordinary machine because you failed to get all the correct information.

Once you have done your research and have decided to make your purchase, make sure of any safety equipment and/or gear you made need. You are making this purchase to have fun and fulfill some dreams, so your safety should be a priority so that you may continue to do so.

And now that you have done everything you need to make your purchase wisely and ensure your laws and safety, go out there and have fun. This is why you why you want to buy your pocket bike to begin with.

You can now buy

online. To view our complete

and comprehensive selection of Pocket Bikes, visit:



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