

Bicycle Education: A Lifelong Investment

By Peter Flucke

For the Bicycle Federation of Wisconsin

“Easy, easy,” I pant as I run along side my 4-year-old daughter as she and her tiny bicycle wobble down the street. The training wheels are off, and today is the day she is going to learn to ride.

Or is it?

Today she will learn to balance. However, this is just the start of a lifelong process. Crash! Ouch! “Honey, are you OK?” Uh, time for a lesson in stopping.

As we are fond of saying in Effective Cycling (a nationally recognized bicycle education program with which I teach part-time), “balancing is not bicycling.”

If “balancing is not bicycling”, what exactly is it? Drawing from a wide range of resources, you too can unravel the mysteries of this wonderful activity.

Read

The off-season is a good time to read a cycling book. There are books on everything from teaching your child to balance to urban assault cycling, from basic mechanics to frame building and from bicycle touring adventures to international racing intrigue.

To find a good cycling book, peruse the shelves at your local library, bookstore or bike shop; check out a book retailer’s Web site under bicycling (they have reviews); or ask a bicycling friend. Whatever book you choose, it will almost certainly add to your reading and riding enjoyment and whet your appetite to learn more.

When time is tight, check out this column in your newspaper. Over the next 12 months we will supply many articles of interest - technical articles on such things as transporting your bicycle and headlights; inspirational articles on losing weight and biking around the world; articles about bicycle commuting to save time, money, the environment; and much more.

Your newspaper, which might in fact be delivered by bicycle to your doorstep, can be a tremendous source of bicycling knowledge.

Ride with a friend

Bicycling is best learned as an apprentice sport. Riding alone is fine, but you will learn more faster if you do at least some of your riding with others.

The trick: find yourself a good rider and attach yourself to him or her like a magnet to the frame of his or her bike. Most riders love to share what they have learned -- all you have to do is ask.

Your bicycle mentor(s) should be someone a bit more advanced than you. Ask questions. But more importantly, watch and learn. Shift when she shifts, drink when he drinks. Soon you will be showing others what it is all about.

Take a bicycle education course

Formalized bicycle education is for everyone, not just children. In fact, as an adult, taking a bike course may be your best path to bicycling proficiency and greater enjoyment.

A good bicycle education course is extremely valuable to everyone. In the Effective Cycling program, for example, people of all ages and abilities learn about bike selection and fit, helmet use, basic bike handling, traffic rules and responsibilities, principles of riding like a vehicle, and minor maintenance. Students immediately apply this knowledge on short group road rides.

“The Effective Cycling course I took opened my eyes to a another level of cycling awareness,” said Laurie Lata, who now teaches the course. Graduates consistently express how much safer and more comfortable they feel riding in a variety of traffic conditions.

Effective Cycling courses are taught by nationally certified instructors and range in cost from free to \$35. To find out more about Effective Cycling courses in your area, contact the Bicycle Federation of Wisconsin.

Get on your bicycle and ride

Bicycling is a skill, and the more you do it the better you get. What a deal!

No matter what your age or experience level, you will be rewarded for a lifetime for the investment in bicycle education you make NOW.

Peter Flucke is the president of WE BIKE, a Green Bay company consulting in the areas of engineering, education and enforcement. This column is provided by the Bicycle Federation of Wisconsin. For more bicycling information see BFW's Web site at www.bfw.org or contact them at (608) 251-4456 or bfw@mailbag.com.