



SECTION FOUR

SKILL UP

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When you can balance without trainer wheels you've pretty much got all the skills you need for bike riding. For confidence in heading out on the roads, though, it's good to be prepared. With knowledge of the road rules and common-sense riding behaviour you can bike it almost anywhere.

Then when you're ready for longer adventures you can build up a training program and hone your efficiency to have you effortlessly clocking up a century ride whenever the weather's too good to be inside.



RIDING ON THE ROAD

Many bike riders say something like “I’d love to ride more, but I’m not confident about riding in traffic”. What a shame that the conditions on our roads put this limit on the people’s transport choices. The bike lanes and separated paths being built around Australia are improving conditions, however, and a growing number of bike commuters already know that the bicycle is a great way to get around. These bike commuters know that by riding assertively, anticipating conditions and selecting the right route, they can ride to their various destinations. When you’re starting out though, take it at your own pace. If you don’t feel ready to tackle the main road yet, stick to quiet streets. Get off and walk if you find yourself in a situation you’re not comfortable with.

ASSERTIVENESS

Bike riders are legitimate road users. When you know that, others on the road can see it. Use your bell to let people know you’re there and you’re confident. Using body language, including hand signals and eye contact, helps everyone share the road. On the other hand, riders who behave inconsistently or nervously make other road users nervous.

Being a legal road user also means you must obey the road rules. These are the same for a bike rider as for a car driver (except for a few minor differences which might vary in different states and territories), so for the most part you need to behave as a motorist does.

Know what’s going on ahead of, beside and behind you. Read the traffic and scan around you regularly. Watch for signs of cars pulling out or looking for a park (which means they probably aren’t looking for you). Make it clear that you plan to use your portion of the road – whether it’s your metre from the kerb

or an entire lane (for example on a roundabout). Sometimes it’s safer to claim an entire lane to stop another vehicle from squeezing past in a space that is really too narrow.



ANTICIPATE CONDITIONS

PEDESTRIANS

Surprisingly, the biggest daily threat can be from pedestrians. When the traffic is backed up for several hundred metres leading up to an intersection, the bike lane is generally clear, however around tram or bus stops and where there is any concentration of people, there’s a danger that someone will step off the footpath or dart across the road because they perceive that the traffic is at a standstill. If you’re not sure that pedestrians have seen you, let them know you’re there by ringing your bell or calling ‘coming through’.

DISAPPEARING BIKE LANES

Unfortunately bike lanes sometimes disappear in the most unhelpful situations, such as at intersections. You’ve still got every right to be there, so indicate and move right to claim your space before you get cut off by cars coming up from behind you. When you’re entering a roundabout, ride in the middle of the lane so that cars won’t squeeze past.

MORE OBSTACLES

Ride one metre out from the kerb as well. You’re more visible that way and you avoid the broken glass and debris that’s swept to the edge of the road.

When riding in Melbourne watch out for tram tracks. Cross tram tracks at right angles and stay off your brakes or tram tracks will eat your bike.



CAR DOORS

Car drivers and passengers sometimes don’t look before opening the car door. As a result, bike riders must ride wide of the ‘door zone’ (the distance the open door sticks out from the vehicle) to avoid a possible collision. Ride in a straight line rather than swerving in and out around parked cars. You might swerve into the path of a passing vehicle. If you can’t stay wide of the door zone, ride slowly and be prepared to brake.

FRONT BRAKES

Don’t be afraid to use them. They will stop you much quicker than rear brakes. Learn to rely on them so that when you really need them it will be automatic.

INTERSECTIONS

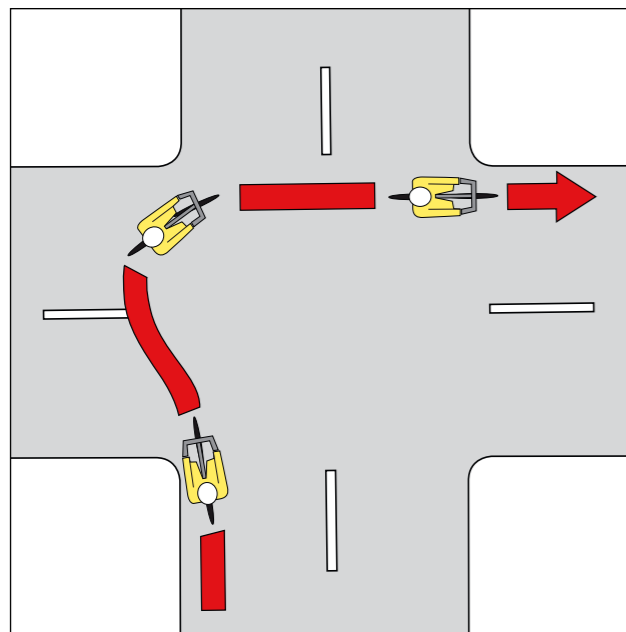
Some intersections now have painted 'stand-up boxes', which provide space for bikes to wait ahead of motor traffic. But where do you stand when there are no bike facilities marked?

Many riders choose to stand ahead of the traffic, regardless of whether the markings are there or not. Here, they're clearly visible, they're away from exhaust fumes, and cars can't squeeze past and cut them off. You should avoid standing in front of left-turning traffic in a left-turn-only lane or one with a green arrow (unless you're turning left). Instead, stand to the left of the middle or right lane.

There may not always be room to get to the front. Experienced riders sometimes ride between lanes of stationary traffic (if there's space); otherwise, the only option is to wait further back (or get off and walk).



A stand-up box



TURNING RIGHT

Most Australian states allow bikes to make a hook turn at any intersection, unless signs specifically prohibit it. (You should check with your state roads or transport authority to make sure.) A hook turn – turning right from the left lane – is often the safest way to turn right. To make a hook turn, ride part-way across and stop ahead of traffic waiting to cross in the other direction. Stand behind the line if possible and wait for the green light (unlike cars making a hook turn, bikes shouldn't go on the orange).

GOING STRAIGHT THROUGH

Move off smartly on the green light, to avoid holding up traffic. The key to accelerating quickly is to change to a low gear before you stop.

Merge left as you ride through the intersection, so you move back to the one-metre-out position on the

left-hand side of the road (or the bike lane, if there is one). But don't move so far left that motorists invade your space; if parked cars on the other side mean you need to stay in the middle of the lane, claim that space until it's safe to let motorists go past.

CHOOSE YOUR ROUTE

Start by speaking to regular bike riders and checking out maps available from your state or territory bike organisation. Aim for a route that avoids fast traffic and narrow roads. You might be able to take off-road bike paths and on-road lanes. If you know someone

who rides in from your direction, ask if they'd like to ride with you. Most regular riders love to share tips and help others get started. Consider doing a trial ride on a weekend.

KNOW THE ROAD RULES

You'll find knowing the road rules is empowering; you'll feel more confident knowing that you're doing the right thing (even if others don't). Check with your state or territory road authority for information on the road rules that apply to your riding. For the most part, the road rules are the same nation-wide; however, there are some areas that differ.

Some frequently misunderstood road rules:

- Bike riders can't ride on the footpath unless under 12 years of age or accompanying a rider under 12 years of age.
- Bike riders can overtake on the left side of other vehicles except when those vehicles are indicating and turning left.
- Bike riders can ride two abreast, though not more than 1.5m apart, and can occupy a whole lane.
- Bike riders must wear a helmet and obey the road rules on off-road paths because off-road paths are part of the road network for the purposes of the law.



RIDING IN THE DARK

As winter-time comes around and the days shorten, you might find yourself riding home in the dark. Even in summer, if you use your bike to commute, you should be prepared for an unexpected ride home in the dark. Riding at night can be a pleasant, unhurried experience in comparison to the busy day-time commute, but there are a few extra precautions you'll need to take. The more easily drivers can see you and your bike on the road, the more pleasant your riding experience will be. But don't worry, there are plenty of ways to increase your visibility at night.

LIGHTS

The national road rules (according to the National Transport Commission) state:

The rider of a bicycle must not ride at night, or in hazardous weather conditions causing reduced visibility, unless the bicycle, or the rider, displays— (a) a flashing or steady white light that is clearly visible for at least 200 metres from the front of the bicycle; and (b) a flashing or steady red light that is clearly visible for at least 200 metres from the rear of the bicycle; and (c) a red reflector that is clearly visible for at least 50 metres from the rear of the bicycle when light is projected onto it by a vehicle's headlight on low-beam.

When it comes to lights, bike shops stock plenty of options. You don't have to buy the most expensive, but like anything, there are good lights and bad lights. *Ride On* magazine publishes an annual review of the latest bike lights in the April–May issue, which is your best guide for choosing bike lights.

It's also important to replace (or recharge) the batteries in your lights regularly. Get in the habit of checking them every fortnight, or, ideally, ask a friend to watch you from 200m away to see if they still pass the test.



HIGH-VISIBILITY CLOTHING

Dressing to be seen is essential for riding in the dark and a range of products are available:

- Brightly coloured, fluorescent cycling jackets (with the added benefit of windproof and water-resistant fabric)
- Safety vests (a cheaper option)
- High-visibility trouser-bands and arm-bands
- A range of specialist cycling products such as flashing vests, luminescent strips and backpack covers.

Don't forget that if you're wearing a backpack, this will cover up your high-visibility jacket or vest; getting creative with reflective material or tape will ensure you're still visible!

CHOOSE YOUR ROUTE

Routes that are traffic-heavy during the day can become pleasant riding at night, so you might decide to change your route accordingly. Similarly, routes that are well-populated in daylight can also become deserted; think about whether you feel safe on these routes.



TEACHING SOMEONE TO RIDE

Teaching someone to ride can be a rewarding and fun experience, and you will be teaching them an important skill that they will be able to use for transport or fitness reasons for many, many years to come. This method is designed for teaching kids to ride but it also works for teenagers and adults.

PREPARATION

Remove any training wheels fitted to the bike. Remove the pedals altogether and lower the seat so the learner can sit on the seat with both feet flat on the ground. If the bike doesn't have a hand brake, there is no stopping mechanism once the pedals are removed – take care

and make sure there is close supervision at all times.

If your learner is a child, talk to them about bike riding and get them excited about learning a new skill. It can seem daunting at first but if you remain relaxed the lesson can be a fun one for both of you.

FIRST STEP

DEVELOPING BALANCE

Do the lesson in an open area, on grass is a good idea in case of falls. Start off by encouraging the learner to walk while seated on the bike. As confidence develops, increase the walking pace.

Introduce a scooting action – both feet go forward and back at the same time rather than the alternating

walking action. Build sufficient speed by scooting then raise feet off the ground so the bike can coast. When the learner is coasting confidently move to the next step.

If the bike is fitted with hand brakes, braking lessons should start here. A gentle slope might be useful, but not essential.

SECOND STEP

DEVELOPING STEERING SKILLS

On an open area set out a short straight slalom course with small markers. Foam blocks about 5cm square make ideal markers as the bike wheels will roll over them easily and not throw the learner off course or off the bike.

Have the learner walk or ride through the slalom, steering left and right, then encourage scooting and coasting through the course. When the learner can coast and steer with basic skill move to the next step.

THIRD STEP

INTRODUCING PEDALLING

Replace the pedals on the bike, making sure the left pedal goes to the left side and the right pedal goes to the right side – they have different threads. Choose an open area with a good surface.

Demonstrate pedal in the 'power position' to start. This means the right pedal crank parallel with sloping down tube of the frame, or right pedal in about the 2 o'clock position.

Steady the learner with a hand on their shoulder as they start. Have the learner push down on the right pedal and continue pedalling. Given a clear space, firm surface, positive encouragement and practice, the learner will quickly get the three skills working together.

If the bike is fitted with a coaster brake (back pedal action) now is the time for a braking lesson.

THE KEY TO LEARNING

- Allow for plenty of practice and make sure one skill is fully developed before moving onto the next step.
- Keep to the open space area until good skill and confidence levels are achieved.
- As the skills develop, start riding your bike with your learner around the open area to get both of you used to riding together. This would be a good time to start teaching them about basic road rules.



PEDALLING EFFICIENCY

There are basically two elements of efficient pedalling: cadence (or revolutions of the pedals per minute) and position on the bike. Knowing the most effective way to pedal and the most energy-efficient way to sit on your bike can save you a lot of effort.

CADENCE

Many beginner bike riders pedal quite slowly when they start, putting more effort into each pedal stroke. In fact, it takes a lot less effort if you pedal faster at a constant rate, whether you're riding on the flat or up a hill. Your gears are the key to doing this.

You need to be in a low enough gear so you can spin the pedals quickly. The ideal number of pedal strokes per minute, called 'cadence', is around 60–90 strokes per minute. In other words, you should aim to turn each pedal at least once per second.

Try to keep your cadence constant across all conditions. For example, if you start going uphill, you need to change down to a lower gear so that you can still spin the pedals comfortably and maintain your cadence.

If you're used to pedalling slowly and pushing hard, pedalling at 60 strokes a minute may seem impossible at first. Just try to build up your speed gradually, and see what a difference it makes to your endurance.

A higher cadence is also known to be better for your knees. Pushing a big gear can cause pain in the knee but a higher cadence in a lower gear doesn't create the same strain.



POSITION

Bike riding positions are on a spectrum ranging from efficient to comfortable. Sitting upright is comfortable but not efficient and leaning forward is efficient but not comfortable. Why is it so?

Efficient performance comes from fully-utilised leg power and minimising wind resistance. Leaning forward stretches the large muscles in the backs of your legs, your hamstrings and *gluteus maximi*, which in turn increases the power they put out. Leaning forward also reduces wind resistance. A riding position which gives you a low, flat upper-body will allow you to reach higher speeds with less apparent effort.

Sitting upright maximises wind resistance and doesn't stretch your hamstrings and glutes. However, an upright sitting position can be made as efficient as possible by having the seat set to right height. This takes full advantage of the power and elasticity in your legs. Refer to 'Seat height' in the Know your bike section pXX for setting up your bike for its best pedalling efficiency.



BUILDING UP TO 100KM

You wouldn't run a marathon without training first, and the same goes for riding a bike. Training should be something you look forward to: start gently and work your way up and get your friends and family to go out with you – make it fun! Here are a few tips to get you across the 100km mark (which, incidentally, is still a lot easier than running a marathon).

BUILD UP SLOWLY AND FREQUENTLY

Gradually increase the time you spend in the saddle. If you're working towards a long or multi-day ride build up slowly over the months leading up to the day.

One of the most important features of successful preparation is to ride regularly. Consistent riding of short to medium distances is far more preferable than irregular longer rides.

TRAINING WITH OTHERS

Training with others can have numerous advantages: aside from being more fun and sociable, it can offer ways of learning things you can't learn from a book. You're bound to pick up extra tips as you watch the way others ride and they watch you – in turn offering lots of constructive feedback.

It's also great for practising some group skills. Practise riding side-by-side and rotating the lead

cyclists to the back of the group. This will be useful if you're riding on a large group event.

Riding with others will also assist in your riding communication skills. Practise calling 'passing', 'pothole ahead', 'stopping', etc.

Try contacting a Bicycle User Group (BUG) to find other riders to train with. Visit www.bv.com.au/find to search for BUGs near you.

TRAINING RIDES

If you're going on a large or multi-day ride, we encourage you to do as much bike riding as possible, either by yourself or with friends or family. Every hour in the saddle will make the event that much easier.

Start off with a number of training rides of about 30km along bike paths and trails in the local area. At first 30km may sound exhausting, but regular weekly rides will build stamina.

Be sure to increase the amount of effort you put into your training rides. You won't increase your stamina or fitness if you are not forcing yourself to exercise more strenuously.

You don't necessarily have to start on roads, but eventually wean yourself off quieter paths and trails – especially if you're working towards a tour or multi-day event.

Add 5–10km each week after the training-ride period to increase your distance slowly. Many back streets are ideal for group training as traffic is minimal.

For the last 10 minutes of the ride, change into an easy gear and gently spin home. This will help

prevent the 'dead leg' syndrome when you're finished – a problem caused by lactic acid pooling in your muscles.

Resting your muscles is just as important as the physical training itself. Listen to your body. You can seriously affect your progress if you over-train.



SUGGESTED TRAINING PROGRAM: FOUR-WEEK 'BUILD-UP PROGRAMME'

WEEK	LONGEST WEEKLY RIDE	OTHER WEEKLY RIDES	TOTAL DISTANCE
1	15km	5km, 10km	30km
2	20km	10km, 15km	45km
3	25km	15km, 20km	60km
4	30km	20km, 25km	75km

