

Kit Up For The Commute



Are you one of the many who've been inspired to cycle to work?

As we ease our way out of the lockdown never has there been a better time to consider cycling as a form of transport, whether to get to and from work, the shops or going out for leisure. More space is now being allocated to cycling which will make getting around the borough is easier than ever. Let's remember too the benefits of cycling to both our physical and mental health. We can build exercise into our daily routine, spend less time stuck in traffic queues or looking for a parking space and save money. It's so easy to get started too, all you need is a bike and some clothes you feel comfortable riding in. Summer is also a great time of year to get into cycling with long hours of daylight and warm weather. As you spend more time cycling and see the savings build up you can then look toward equipping yourself for the autumn and winter months. Here are some top tips to help you work out what's necessary and what simply make cycling more enjoyable.

Before we get into equipment here's just a quick word on preparation. Have as much as you can ready the night before, pack whatever you can in your backpack or panniers and make sure whatever your wearing is handy. Make sure the bike is ready to roll, especially checking the tyres to make sure you don't have any punctures. If you're using lights make sure they're charged up. If you're planning your first ride to work make sure you know your route and have a rough idea how long it will take. Do a test run if you can during the weekend or a day off – it all helps to make life a little easier.

What kind of bike do I need?

The answer depends a little on your typical route and whether or not you'll be using the same bike for anything other than just transport. A great starting point is a type of bike known as a hybrid. These are as robust as a mountain bike but with more of a road bike frame making them quicker on tarmac and hard gravel tracks. They will generally have tyres wider and more comfortable than a road bike yet smoother and easier rolling than a true MTB. Some come with front suspension and some without – suspension does make a slightly more comfy ride but soaks up a little energy and really only has any benefit on very rough surfaces. Many hybrids are offered at the budget end of the market and have straight handlebars making them ideal for people new or returning to cycling.



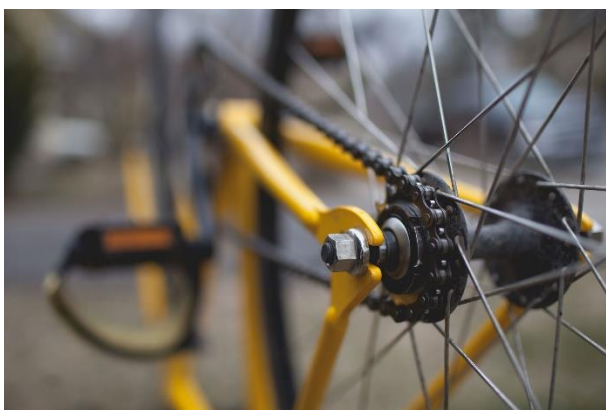
Gravel bikes are a fairly new concept and have taken the enthusiast market by storm. They're designed primarily for long days in the saddle on mixed terrain however many dedicated cycle commuters have found them ideal for the ride to work. Like a road bike they have drop handlebars which enable a range of riding positions ranging from comfortable to all out speed. Like a hybrid they have wider tyres and mounting points for mudguards and luggage racks.

Folding bikes are another option. A little more expensive than any standard cycle they are ideal if storage space at home or work is limited and can be carried on and off public transport as though they were a piece of luggage.

Mountain bikes and road bikes are designed for particular purposes but still can be used for the commute, you just have to remember a mountain bike will be slower on road and a road bike is unsuitable for unpaved surfaces.

E-Bikes are now becoming more and more common. Like a regular cycle you still need to turn the pedals so you get some exercise which raises the heart rate enough to be beneficial. However the motor can do such a fantastic job of assisting that e-bikes have opened up cycling to those who may be unable to ride a regular bike for any significant distance. They also have the added benefit of making cycling sweat free which is a massive advantage to some commuters.

How do I keep my bike maintained?



Like any machine bikes do need a bit of maintenance, however regular maintenance is not beyond the capabilities of most riders. The most common issue is getting a puncture. Quite simply bike tyres cannot fend off sharp objects as well as car tyres and at some point a puncture will happen. There are lots of puncture repair tutorials online so familiarise yourself and practice removing and remounting a wheel and tyre. The quickest way to deal with a puncture is to replace the tube so carry a spare – you can then repair the punctured tube later and keep that as another spare. Self sealing

tubes are great too – they have a sealant inside which plugs holes upto about 3mm and sometimes just need a little more air in the tyre to get you rolling again.

The chain will also need a little TLC. Chains need just a little oil or lubricant to keep them running smoothly. Too much and the chain gathers dirt, too little and it will soon go rusty. There are lots of products on the market and it can get a bit confusing but most chain oils will work fine for most cyclists. If you ride in the rain, which you probably will, it's good to give the chain a spray and wipe with GT85, this will displace water and leave a Teflon lubricant on the chain. Whatever product you use wiping the chain with an old cloth helps work the lubricant into the links and removes any excess from the surface.

Just like you would with a car, treat your bike to an annual service or six monthly if you ride a lot. A full service will take care of bearings, brakes, drivetrain and suspension and a qualified mechanic will be able to sort out any issues. Many keen cyclists are even happy to do their own servicing but for expert advice there are plenty local independent bike shops who will help keep your bike in great condition.

What accessories do I need?

Front and rear lights are a legal requirement when riding in the dark and invaluable when riding in poor daytime light. More can be found at [this link](#) Make sure your main front and rear lights are not likely to become obscured. Additional lights are a good idea for extra visibility and handy as a standby in case your main light fails for any reason. Most lights now use LED technology which makes them bright and economical and many are USB rechargeable which is really convenient

Mudguards are great in wet weather and will keep the majority of road spray off you and your bike. A pannier rack makes carrying luggage easier and a small bag under your saddle or attached to the frame is ideal for carrying spare tubes and tyre levers. Don't forget a pump, many of these come with mounting brackets which fit easily to the bike frame and are often small enough to pop into a bag.

A multi tool is also a very handy piece of kit to carry, they are really small and have all the right tools to deal with most roadside repairs should the need arise

What's the best way to carry things?



A backpack is convenient provided you don't have a lot of heavy items to carry. Make sure it's not sitting too loose on your back and any long straps are tucked away so they don't get caught in the wheels. Cycle specific backpacks cost a little more but they are designed so sit nicely on your back, are usually 100% waterproof and have reflective detailing. Reflective and waterproof backpack covers are also available. If you don't have a waterproof backpack then it's a good idea to

wrap items in plastic bags. Panniers allow you to carry more luggage and keep the weight off your back but might not be so easy to carry into the office. For large loads there is always the option of towing a trailer but these obviously add more weight and are more difficult to manoeuvre.

What clothing do I need?

To get started most people will find something in their wardrobe which will be ok to ride in. Some commuters even just ride in their regular work clothes. A lot depends on how far your ride is, what the weather is like and what changing facilities you have at your destination.

First thing to remember – it doesn't have to be Lycra. Let's get that myth well and truly dispelled as the thought of wearing

Lycra seems to put some people off straight away. You can start with the basics and build up a set of better clothing as your cycling progresses. You might even find you eventually need to go down a size or two. What you need is something which allows free leg movement without getting caught in the chain. In the summer shorts are great, colder months then tracksuit bottoms are fine. If you wish to spend some cash on cycle specific clothing there are lots of items which are tailored for cycling but look no different to regular clothes when you're off the bike and they do make a difference when cycling.

Summer cycling mitts aren't essential but do offer comfort on longer rides. When the temperature drops full gloves start to become an essential as your hands will get cold and make it difficult to operate the brake levers. There are a lot of gloves on the market ranging from thin to multi layered and ranging in price from affordable to premium. What you wear will depend largely on how long a journey you make and just how much your hands are affected by the cold.

Comfortable footwear is another good start. Trainers and walking shoes work well on standard pedals. Dedicated cycling shoes tend to have a stiffer sole which prevents your feet from feeling tired on longer journeys and many offer the option of going clipless for the more confident rider.

Do I need waterproofs?

Does it rain in Britain is the answer. Although it's good to stay dry your worst enemy is actually getting a chill, your second worst is overheating. Waterproofs come in various weights with some being very light and designed to fend off summer showers and some heavier and designed for prolonged spells of winter rain. All waterproofs have one thing in common - regardless of their design or price, none are 100% waterproof, it always seems to find a way in somehow. The thicker winter jackets make you sweat when the weather starts to get milder. The best way to protect yourself from the elements is to layer up with breathable fabrics and a softshell outer layer is fine in cooler temperatures when chances of rain are minimal. If the forecast is for a high chance of rain then wear a waterproof for the full journey otherwise pack the waterproof in your bag just in case.

Do I need a hi-vis?

Wearing a hi-vis isn't mandatory however some cyclists feel reassured to be more visible. Many winter cycling jackets are both fluorescent and reflective however a tabard or a Sam Browne belt are both more affordable methods that can be worn over anything. Any brightly coloured clothing and anything with bold highly contrasting colours works effectively.



Do I need a helmet?



Whilst it is not a legal requirement to wear a helmet when cycling it is strongly advised to do so. The only requirement is that a helmet sold in the UK must meet standard EN1078. For more information on helmets follow [this link](#) from RoSPA.

So, you've got your bike and you're kitted out to start enjoying the freedom of cycling but don't forget to plan ahead for when the days get shorter and the weather gets cooler.