

TRAVELS WITH BIKEY: You Can Take It With You

A few years ago, I took some time off to bicycle across Europe. It was foolish in a way. I had never before bicycled more than five miles at a stretch. In fact, I'd only ridden a ten-speed twice before I landed in Ireland with a pannier-laden Lambert to start my journey.

I was inspired by an Irish friend of my parents who rode from Dublin to New Delhi on a sturdy one-speed she called Roz. I named my bike Minnaloushe, after a cat in a Yeats poem, or Loushe for short. Before long I was covering sixty, seventy, eighty miles a day, despite several breakdowns and one misadventure with a cow in an Irish pasture (it knocked over my tent one night and nearly stepped on me). My trip took seven months, and I cycled along the Irish coast, up to Scotland's Outer Hebrides, across France, down Italy and over Greece—some four thousand miles altogether.

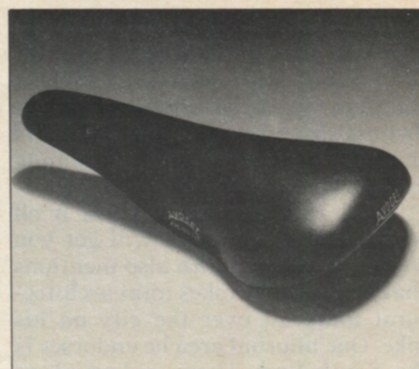
It was a great trip. Bicycling is simply an ideal way to travel. You don't have to bother with bus schedules, complicated car rentals or train routes. You can go just where you want, when you want. Cycling is good exercise, and you go slowly enough to really take in the countryside—even smell it!—instead of whizzing past. All you hear is the whir of the sprockets.

Getting your bike overseas is simple:

Just take it with you. Most airlines consider it baggage. All they ask is that you either box it or turn the handlebars sideways and remove the pedals. And if you need to get someplace you can't pedal to, it's easy to take along your bicycle on a train, a ferry or even a bus.

A few tips: Buy a bike before you go; it's hard to find ten-speeds to rent in Europe. Be aware that when you enter some countries, border personnel will note on your passport that you are traveling by bike, and this means you will have to leave with that bike. Thus, you shouldn't take the bike along hoping to sell it for a high profit.

Once on the road, don't try to cover enormous distances right away. Your bottom is going to be sore for a few days, so easy does it. Be sure to get detailed maps: You'll want to know about all the back roads. Carry as little baggage as possible. Books, especially, are like bricks; bring along one or two and trade with other cyclists. Also, prepare a list of foreign phrases describing repairs you might need (inflate the tires, straighten the spokes, replace the brake blocks). In Italy, Loushe was oiled where she should have been greased. Finally, give your bicycle a name. The two of you will be getting quite close.—John Sedgwick



Blazing Saddles

Bike seats, or saddles, come in two types, racing and touring models. The choice is determined largely by what kind of handlebars you prefer, which in turn determines riding posture.

If you like level handlebars, you will be riding in an upright position. Since all of your weight will rest on it, the saddle must be fairly wide—to spread its support over a broader area—and must have good shock-absorbing capacity. Choose the touring saddle with springs underneath.

With dropped bars, on the other hand, you will do your riding in a crouch, with your weight distributed evenly between the saddle and handlebars. Since you are resting on two points instead of one, the ride feels much less bumpy. The springs of the touring saddle become unnecessary, and because your pelvis is canted forward, its width would chafe your thighs at every stroke. A long, narrow racing saddle is best here.

Most serious cyclists choose a leather saddle. Even though it may feel like iron at first, a well-broken-in leather saddle fits its owner as if it were custom-made.—B.F.

BIKE BIBLES

DeLong's Guide to Bicycles and Bicycling, by Fred DeLong, Chilton Book Co., \$12.95. Very complete. Read the chapter "Spacecraft With a Human Engine" on cycling efficiency.

Glenn's Complete Bicycle Manual, by Clarence W. Coles and Harold T. Glenn, Crown Publishers Inc., \$5.95. To get the most out of this, buy a tool kit first.

The Complete Book of Bicycling, by Eugene A. Sloane, Trident Press, \$9.95. Bikers swear by this detailed book.

THE 10-SPEED FIT

If you've committed yourself to the joys of biking by plunking down \$80 to \$200 for a sturdy ten-speed racer, you should tailor that two-wheeled wonder to your body. It's uncomfortable and dangerous not to adjust it: The National Safety Council estimates that the chances of accident are five times as great with an ill-fitting bike.

Adjusting the seat: Bring the shaft that's connected to the pedals directly in line with the long bar (seat tube) extending down from the seat. Loosen the bolt at the top of this bar and raise or lower the seat until one leg can be fully extended with heel on pedal when you sit on the bike. Tighten bolt.

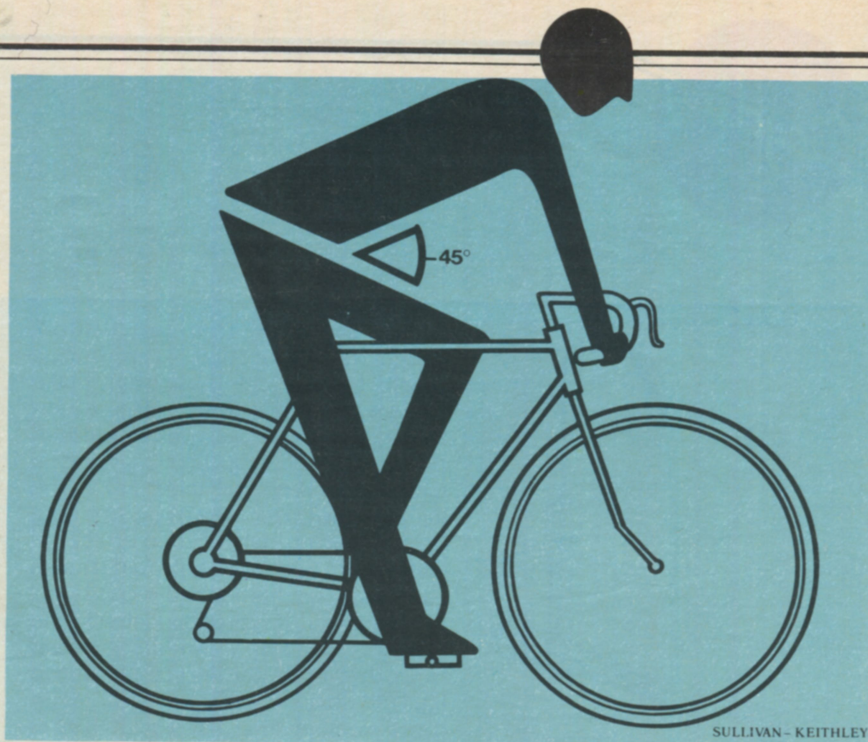
Next, loosen the bolt attached to the saddle clip (located underneath the saddle). Tilt the front of the saddle (the nose) slightly upward. While the bolt is loose, move the saddle so that it is dead centered over the seat tube. With this adjustment you'll be placing just the right amount of weight on the back of the bicycle. Bikers who want more power in their pedaling should usually move the saddle slightly forward.

Handlebar height: With the purchase of a ten-speed bike, a rider graduates from the 90-degree touring position to the 45- to 50-degree crouch. The difference? It's more comfortable for longer periods of biking, faster (less wind resistance) and more stable, since it distributes weight evenly over

the bike. To achieve this angle, the handlebars should be adjusted so that your back bends easily from the waist. If the angle is too great, your vertebrae will have to carry the strain of being hunched. If the angle is correct, your arms will be nearly parallel to the extended leg. To raise or lower the handlebars, loosen the bolt at the stem and bring the top bar to the height of the saddle nose.

The correct distance from the nose of

the saddle to the handlebars is the distance from your elbow to your fingertips. You may be able to achieve this by moving the handlebars up or down slightly; if not, you can buy an adjustable handlebar stem that permits horizontal movement. To adjust the angle, loosen the bolt at the top of your handlebars and rotate them so the ends point slightly toward the ground; that way you'll be able to pull on them as you go uphill. — J.D.



SULLIVAN - KEITHLEY

EUROPE À LA BICYCLE: 4 Scenic Routes

All of the following European bike routes are 150 to 200 miles long, and it should take the average cyclist about two weeks to really see the sights.

1. **Southwest Ireland.** Dingle—Tralee (via the Connor Pass, which is 1,500 feet of incline)—Ballinskelligs—Bantry—Skibbereen. This route takes you by a 3,000-foot mountain range called Macgillycuddy's Reeks, up high cliffs overlooking barren islands where Christian hermits hid out in the ninth century, along broad and sandy beaches, through green fields and past hundreds of pubs. Avoid large towns like Killarney, which are heavily touristed and un-Irish.

2. **France's Loire Valley.** Orléans—Blois—Tours—Angers. "The garden of France," where French royalty of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries built their country retreats. This flat-to-downhill route swings by the finest of them, Chenonceaux astride the River Cher and colossal Chambord (nearly

500 feet square) snuggled away in the Forest of Boulogne. There are dozens of abbeys, cathedrals and museums to see as well.

3. **Germany's Mosel River.** Trier—Koblenz. The Mosel is just as beautiful as the river it pours into, the Rhine, but not nearly so polluted and commercialized. Ducks still swim in the Mosel. Though this route is almost entirely downhill, watch out for hairpin turns as the river winds its way around Germany's finest vineyards and past colorful market towns.

4. **Northern Italy.** Florence—San Gimignano—Siena—Perugia—Assisi. Lovely as this countryside is, the high points of this route are to be found indoors. The museums, cathedrals and palaces of Tuscany and Umbria house some of the most beautiful art in the world. The hills go straight up and down. They're only for the well-conditioned cyclist who knows how to use his gears. — J.S.

