

Bikes . . . and more bikes

by Bill Lovin
and
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Staff Writers

The bike business is booming in Chapel Hill. More than 2,000 students and townspeople have joined the ranks of a new breed of pedal-pushers and the pedestrian is disappearing from campus sidewalks.

ECOS, city government and local biking clubs are encouraging this interest in two-wheel transportation. And local bike retailers are enjoying a sudden success.

The Chapel Hill Bicycle Club started its activities in early April. The club has grown in popularity as the biking craze has caught on.

The club promotes the use of bicycles for all segments of the population and encourages legislation which improves biking conditions. They hope to work with enthusiasts organizing in Raleigh and Durham.

Tours, camping trips, bicycle movies and a bike fashion show are planned for hard-core cyclists.

ECOS, a campus ecology group, promotes biking as an alternative to pollution-producing cars. The group began a bicycle rental service in an effort

to introduce non-riders to the sport.

Starting with eight bikes purchased with a Carolina Union loan, ECOS now rents 19, including a new tandem. Diverse groups, including the N.C. League of Women Voters and UNC faculty members, gave money to buy new bikes.

A Bike Day, sponsored jointly by ECOS and the Chapel Hill Bicycle Club, was designed to make the Chapel Hill area aware of the transportation capabilities of a bicycle. Most people got the point as 500 cyclists paraded down the city's streets.

Town officials showed their support as Chapel Hill Mayor Howard Lee and Alderman Alice Welsh led the parade on their bikes.

Changes in city bicycling regulations reflect the growing popularity of cycle commuting.

Until April 26 it was unlawful to ride a bike on either side of Franklin, Rosemary or Columbia Streets. Leaving a bicycle unattended was also prohibited.

Now the Chapel Hill Board of Aldermen has established bike paths on nine of the town's major roads. Signs approved by the Bicycle Institute of America mark the routes.

Ramps at intersections and smoother sidewalks are being constructed for cycling convenience. Signs are going up,

urging motorists to "watch bicycles on your right."

Alderman Alice Welsh feels that the new ordinances were long overdue. "It's about time we pointed out that bicyclists exist," she said.

She has asked UNC officials to make bicycle paths on the University campus.

"We have gotten no cooperation at all from this quarter," she complained.

Campus Police Chief Arthur Beaumont confirmed Mrs. Welsh's criticisms of the University administration.

"I tried to get bike interest on campus several years ago to help the traffic problem," he said, "but the administration frowned on the idea."

Beaumont said one University official, whom he would not name, has sought to abolish bikes on campus for "pedestrian safety." But Beaumont said there have been no serious biking accidents and only minor complaints from non-biking students.

Vandalism and theft, rather than congestion, are the most serious biking problems at UNC, according to Beaumont.

Chains, spokes and brakes are easily damaged by a pull or a kick, and tires have been slashed. Locks have been sawed through and bikes stolen.

A ready market exists for "hot" bikes.

Beaumont said many students leave their bikes locked to racks in summer and find them missing in September.

The Campus Police will register any bike free of charge to aid in recovery if the bike is stolen. The serial number is kept on file, with the bike's description. An identifying sticker is put on the bike.

Among the non-bikers who are enthusiastic about the trend toward two-wheel transportation are the Chapel Hill bike retailers.

Jerry Buchanan of Western Auto in Carrboro calls the biking boom "terrific and tremendous." Terrific for retail sales and so tremendous that merchants can't keep up with the demand.

Not only are bikes scarce but parts for bikes are almost unavailable. The thin racing tires, gears and brake units have disappeared from dealer shelves.

The demand for used bikes is also very great. Dealers who take bikes in trade say they usually sell for double the trade-in value within 24 hours.

One retailer said the "whole bike thing" was summed up in a letter he'd received from his supplier.

The letter said that no orders for standard or racer bikes could be filled but " tandems, exercisers, unicycles and adult three-wheelers continue to be in good supply."



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If buying a bike, don't be fooled



Cover photo by Johnny Lindahl

Thousands of Americans are buying bicycles.

Unfortunately, most people are buying in the dark, paying first-class prices for second-rate machines.

There are several things to look for when buying a bike. A good frame is the most important part of a good bike. The weight and responsiveness of the bike is largely determined by the frame.

Most good bikes come in frame sizes of 20 to 25 inches, measured from the top of the seat tube to the pedals' "axle."

To find the right frame size the rider should straddle the bike and, if the size is correct, clear the frame by about two inches. A frame that is too big for the rider makes dismounting dangerous and difficult.

The best, most responsive frames are made with a special steel alloy called Reynolds 531, made only in England. Look for a Reynolds seal on the frame.

The gears are second most important. A ten-speed bike uses a two-sprocket chain wheel in front and a five sprocket wheel in back to get its ten gear combinations.

The shifters, or derailleurs as they're called, guide the chain into any of the graduated sprockets like a V-belt changing pulleys. Most racing ten-speeds come with a very close gear ratio. The average rider would probably need a wider gear ratio for hills.

A wide ratio gear system would have a chainwheel (the sprocket attached to the pedals) with 40 and 50 tooth gears and a freewheel (the backwheel gears) with 14, 17, 20, 24, and 28-tooth sprockets.

Wide ratio gearing is important if you're not in top shape. A lower low will help on hills.

The derailleur is a fairly complicated gadget but the actual make is not really important. Campagnolo, Simplex and Huret Alvit are rated quieter and smoother than others and appear on most good bikes.

Brakes should be the centerpull type for smoother, quicker stops.

Hubs, wheels, pedals and pedal cranks will be made of aluminum on most good bikes for lightweight.

The turned-down handlebars and skinny seat of the ten-speed racer take some getting used to, but they are designed for maximum pedalling efficiency.

A good bike is not cheap but it doesn't have to cost a mint if you know what you want.

For \$80 you can get a simple ten-speed version of the English racer. It could weight thirty pounds or more.

\$100 to \$110 will buy a drop in weight to 28 pounds, with better frame steel.

\$120 will get a bike weighing 24 pounds or so, possibly with Reynolds tubing.

\$160 to \$170 buys a first-class machine with Reynolds tubing, alloy rims, hubs, pedals, etc., weighing 22 pounds.

More than \$200 buys a deluxe racing machine with the finest components.

Look for bikes like Peugeot, Frejus, Raleigh or Mercier and you can't go wrong. For more information on bikes and biking consult the "Complete Book of Bicycling" by Eugen A. Sloane (Trident Press).