

How to Select the Right Bike for You

Looking for a fun, comfortable way to be outdoors? Need a quick, stress-free way to escape gridlock for errands? How about a great way to exercise and chat with family and friends at the same time? The right bicycle offers all these benefits. So what's holding you back?

If you tried cycling years ago and suffered on a 10-speed, those days are gone! Today's bicycles are incredible light, easy to ride, and most importantly, they take comfort and ergonomics to new heights.

The most comfortable types of bicycles are naturally called Comfort bikes. And, there are also comfortable models called Hybrid bikes. In fact Comfort and Hybrid bikes are so luxuriously plush you may have difficulty deciding which suits you best. That's exactly why we've prepared this article.

After reading these guidelines, feel free to call with any questions or visit and ride a few Comfort and Hybrid bicycles to feel the wonderful ride for yourself.



Start By Answering These Questions

Here are a few easy questions to help you in selecting the bike type and model:

- Is top quality a priority, or is price point more important?
- Do you consistently select high-tech gadgets or do you prefer practical, no-frills designs?
- How much would you like to spend? (This is an easy way to narrow the myriad selections.)

Most importantly, what type of riding do you plan to do? If you envision leisurely Sunday rides, family outings in search of the perfect picnic spot and having fun while you exercise, a Comfort bike is a great choice.

Perhaps you're looking for a quick, street-worthy alternative to driving? And a fun, knee-friendly way to get into shape? You want comfort, yet also pedaling efficiency for quick commutes or even the occasional half-century. Here, a Hybrid bike, a nimble jack-of-all-trades, is ideal.

Hybrid Vs. Comfort Bike

So what sets these regal rides apart? The easiest way to tell the two apart is wheel and tire size, as follows:

Comfort bikes use the 26-inch tire standard commonly found on mountain bikes. These wide tires provide a comfortable cushion of air that floats over bumps and rough terrain. Plus, it's possible to install knobby tires should you live on a dirt road.

Hybrid bikes usually (but not always) use the road bike's 700c standard. These tires roll easily on pavement for quick acceleration and easy climbing. This size accepts tires from 23- to 42-millimeters wide for riding on difference surfaces.

Now that you understand the typical wheel differences, here's a chart that outlines the other features setting these bicycle types apart:

Frame Materials



The frame is the backbone of your new ride and it's available in a variety of materials. Here are some considerations to help in choosing:

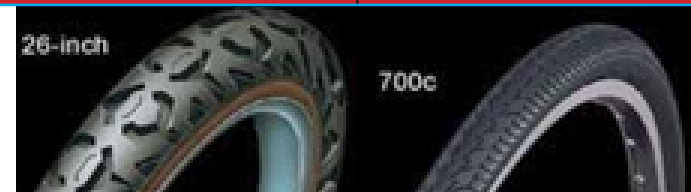
- High-Tensile Steel
- PROS: Strong, most affordable, nice ride; usually found on entry-level bikes
- CONS: Weighs more and rusts if not cared for
- Chromoly Steel
- PROS: An affordable steel alloy offering light weight and a great ride
- CONS: Rusts if not cared for; more expensive than High-Tensile Steel
- Aluminum
- PROS: Light, strong, affordable, rust/corrosion resistant, great ride
- CONS: More expensive than Steel

Suspension



A common feature on today's Hybrids and Comfort bikes is a suspension fork. These (photo, right) compress to absorb impacts from bumps, cracks, ruts and obstacles. This ensures that you remain in control even over rough surfaces. And it also insulates you from jolts for a smoother and more comfortable ride. Most forks employ coil springs or elastomers. We recommend riding different bicycles and

Hybrid	Comfort
Frame designed for comfort and efficient pedaling	Frame designed mostly for comfort
Adjustable components offer upright comfort or a more speed-oriented position (your choice)	Laid-back riding position is more back-friendly than most easy chairs
Suspension and strong, light materials are fast and absorb vibration too	Plush suspension takes the sting out of bumps
Soft, sleek saddles are comfortable and offer efficient pedaling, too	Saddles with springs, gel and foam provide luxurious seating
High air pressure in the tires makes higher speeds and long rides easy	High air volume in the tires provides a super-plush ride!



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comparing how different forks feel. If you like the handling and comfort of one over another, it's a good reason to select that model bicycle. Suspension seatposts (photo, below) are another excellent feature found on Comfort bikes and Hybrids. These provide an excellent and light-weight way to soften bumps and add comfort right where it's needed most.

They absorb vibration and impacts that would otherwise be transmitted to your seat and lower back. You'll love how they smooth rough terrain and pothole-covered roads.

Keep in mind that, should you find a bike you love that happens not to come with a suspension seatpost (not all Comfort bikes and Hybrids come with them), it's possible to add a suspension seatpost, too (sold separately).

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Gearing



One of the greatest advances in bicycle technology is improvements in gearing, which makes it easier than ever to change gears and to cover even challenging terrain comfortably. Today's bikes come with a variety of easy-shifting and hill-conquering gearing options, which is why we asked you earlier to be thinking about where you'll ride the bike. If where you ride is pretty flat, you can get by on a bike with fewer gears than if you plan to ride rolling or hilly terrain.

For example, you'll find bikes with 7- to 8-speed gearing (photo, above) that are great for neighborhood rides or flat bike lane excursions. If you plan to pull a trailer and hit some hills, though, you'll do better with a 24- or 27-speed drivetrain (photo, below) because it offers lower gearing, which helps greatly with the extra effort of climbing and pulling a trailer or carrying gear.

Regardless of which gearing you choose, you'll find that modern bikes shift with the flick of a wrist via motorcycle-style twist shifters, or a simple push of a button-style lever. You no longer have to "feel" for the gear when shifting, either. You just click the bike into gear and it's suddenly easier to pedal.

You'll love it and it ends all worries about shifting. In fact, many Comfort and Hybrid bikes even include a display that lets you know exactly what gear you're in!

Brakes



These modern bicycles feature advanced braking, too. Which means you have more control over speed and the ability to stop fast with very little hand effort. If it's been a while since you've ridden, you'll be impressed with the new systems, which rival power brakes in an automobile.

Most Comfort bikes and Hybrids are equipped with either rim brakes called V-Brakes, linear- or direct-pull brakes or hub brakes, which are integral to the front and/or rear hubs.

While still rare on these types of bicycles, you may also see some featuring disc brakes, the newest brake type, which sport calipers and rotors at the center of the wheels, car-style.

In general, any given bicycle will have brakes suited to the riding use it was designed for. For example, V-Brakes (photo, right) are powerful stoppers and excellent for all-round riding, from casual neighborhood rambles to commuting every workday, even in nasty weather. Hub brakes are usually found on bicycles designed for less rigorous riding and trade durability and low maintenance for maximum stopping power.

Though not found on many Hybrid or Comfort bikes yet, disc brakes offer excellent braking and low maintenance, however, they fall in the most expensive category.

Saddles



You may not be able to tell by looking, yet one of the components most improved on Comfort and Hybrid bicycles is the saddle. Engineers and designers have pulled out all the stops to provide ergonomics and comfort features to make these seats so comfy you're likely to remain seated at stops while your ride partners are resting on the grass.

You'll find anatomical shapes, cutouts to eliminate pressure on soft tissue (which prevents numbness and pain), flexible frames, gel padding and cushioning springs. Sometimes, all of these things in the same seat, even.

Still, the most important thing is making sure that the seat on the bike is the right one for you. Everyone's different so you should sit on the seats and try them out to make sure that they're right for you.

Additional Advice

We recommend planning on spending a portion of your cycling budget on some important cycling accessories to go with that new bike.

If you don't already have one, you'll want to purchase a helmet. New models are safer, lighter and more comfortable than ever.

To protect your purchase, you'll also want a good lock. If you plan to ride further from home than you'd like to walk back, it's also a good idea to pick up a small flat-repair kit and a pump.

And, there are plenty of other goodies to enhance your cycling, such as cycling shorts, eyewear, gloves, and magazines with all kinds of excellent cycling information.