

TRY A TOUR—IT'S FUN

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(Randonneur of CYCLING)

The thing about cycle touring is that it is carefree and it's *fun*. Ask any cycle tourist, and he (or she) will tell you that there's nothing to compare with a holiday awheel, whether it's just a day or weekend trip or a whole vacation, for sheer enjoyment, interest and relaxation.

It's a recreation shared by the young and the not so young, and the fit and the not so fit; you don't have to be a Tarzan or an Amazon—but you must be correctly equipped, machine and clothing, to enjoy it fully.

People come in various shapes and sizes, and so do cycles, and it's most important that the size of the cycle frame, let's assume something like a Mistral, should be suitable for the individual rider. Look at 'Make the best of your bike' for this. Given the right adjustment of saddle and handlebars, riding should be comfortable and thus your pedalling effort will be used to maximum effect. If you have the slightest discomfort, there is something maladjusted which must be put right.

What about gears? The idea behind their use is to produce a constant rate of pedalling whatever the grade, and hence whatever the speed. There's no particular magic in a 'ten-speed' machine—five gears will often give an adequate range (a difference between top and bottom gears of 40" or so),

Eight or ten can double this difference. It depends what you want to do. As a guide, a good 'middle' gear is 60in, a gear of 30in will enable most riders to tackle a 1 in 7 gradient (even with touring kit aboard) and a gear of 90in is useful in a following wind on the level. (See gear table on back cover.)

Speed is not the tourist's main consideration; ease of riding and enjoyment are the aims.

You can get all you need for tours up to a week in length in a large saddlebag like a Highlander. On longer trips, or if you're going cycle-camping, you'll want pannier bags or a handlebar bag (or both) as well. Rear panniers hold a lot of kit; front panniers and handlebar bags are smaller but handy for carrying 'at the ready' things needed on the road like camera, chocolate, maps, though you may prefer a separate map-holder.

Make sure that all bags are fixed securely; importantly, the rack or frame carrying pannier bags must be rigidly attached to the cycle frame and for maximum reliability should be basically triangular in shape and of steel. Look at the pannier section and your purse can decide what you can afford.

Light, loose clothing is best. When it's warm, shirt and shorts with white socks feel and look good. Cooler conditions call for 'longs'—knee-length pants (track suit or tailored style) and long socks are popular, with long-sleeved pullovers and anorak. You create your own breeze when riding in warm weather, and your own warmth when riding in the cold; you soon discover this and your personal optimum clothing needs.

Consult the gear chart on the inside back cover when choosing your ratios.

Belge training suits, page 13, make ideal cool-weather touring wear, warm and easily washed.

Ever thought of touring on tubs? The 15½oz Worthy, page 77, is an all-weather tyre.

Some items of clothing designed for the sporting cyclist are also very practical for the tourist—woollen racing shorts, a road racing jersey with pockets at the back, for example. But in the end you can choose your own style of wear from most sports and leisure clothing. Cycling shoes are specially styled and stitched to cope with the flexing caused by pedalling.

You need good maps for touring. Ordnance Survey in England, Michelin, Hallweg on the Continent. The average 'road diagram' kind is useless to the cyclist. Advance planning is best done with a small-scale map of the area to be visited—you can see the complete general layout on a map of 16 miles to the inch (metric equivalent 1 : 1,000,000).

Having settled the general outline with this, detailed sheets of about 3 miles to the inch (1:200,000) reveal the minor roads and scenic ways to choose. Most map-makers show trunk roads in red. Avoid these like the plague.

There's almost always a network of minor roads for the cyclist—they're free of all but local traffic and are of far better scenic and interesting quality. Not only that, on them you come across unhurried towns and villages and you really meet the people, who welcome you as a guest and not as a mere traveller. You'll often find quieter and more pleasant accommodation off the beaten track, too.

Continental maps are traditionally to metric scales, but in Britain we are in the process of changing from miles to metres. A lot of 'miles' maps are still in use but all new issues are metric—but 'on the ground' signposts continue to show distances in miles!

Wherever you go, don't overdo the local food and drink until you've found out what effect it has on you, if any! There's always a chance that strange diet will cause protests from inside, and these do nothing to make cycling more pleasant. It's best anyway to take the main meal of the day in the evening when on the road.

So it might rain. So what? You have your cape and cap. It's never so bad as it looks through a window. You don't have to take my word for it. Coming?