

LEISURE

Nobody gets left behind

Bike trailers allow parents to take the whole family along

Whether it's a short trip to the market or an all-day excursion, there's no excuse for leaving the toddlers at home any more.

Simply attach the universal joint to the back of your bike, strap Michael and Jessica into their Alternative Child Transportation system (ACT) and off you go.

"We do live in the age of acronyms," says Jamey Mikkelsen, owner of Spoke O'Motion in Newmarket. "So why not bike trailers, too?"

Call them what you will, bike trailers or ACT systems. The fact is, they're moving out of the bicycle showrooms and on to the streets where parents have never felt more secure with a child in tow.

"Safety is the biggest issue for parents," Mikkelsen said. "And there's no doubt about the safety of these products."

There are numerous models available with prices starting in the \$180 range for a one-wheel system that hooks on to the back of your bike. Go for a lightweight frame with a gear system and waterproof cover and you can expect to pay more.

"If you do spend a bit more money, you do get actual value," Mikkelsen said. "Some lower-end models had to be recalled (last year) because there was more play, less stability in the construction, the tire had a tendency to rub through the canopy to the point where they were burning the child's arm."

Multi-wheel trailers, many of which can be converted to joggers or strollers, start at about \$280 and go right up to about \$600. Again, things such as frame construction, waterproof canopy and larger interior with the ability to have the kids face either way will help determine the bottom line.

For those of you who are free of restraints, at least the kind that require bathroom stops on the hour, "free-riding" is the latest craze, say bike retailers. "Say you're at the top of the hill and there's no trail between you and the bottom of the hill," said Mikkelsen, "free riders go straight down." And they do it with a full suspension bike.

"You can get one for \$400, but you won't get the performance that you get with a more expensive full suspension bike," Mikkelsen said.

However, until recently, free riders had to spend \$5,000 and up to find a bike that could handle the extreme terrain.

There's a new bike developed by GT Bicycles called the I-Drive," Mikkelsen said. "It's a full suspension bike that doesn't suck up all your power. They start at about \$1,400. Considering what's been available in the past, that's a very affordable price for full suspension."

Capturing the extreme look is all part of the package. Mikkelsen added that's made the full-finger glove with the padding on the back a popular accessory this spring. But nowhere is comfort more important than on that part of the anatomy that comes in direct contact with the seat.

"Cargo shorts with a Suplex (hockey jersey-like material) liner lets you breathe and gives you that casual rider look," Mikkelsen said. "They're very hot this year."

William Martinen of Cyclepath, a Toronto bicycle retailer, says the biggest change in clothing is that it is specifically designed for cycling. "Everything is more refined, whether it's meshed-back leather gloves in the \$15 range or combination of leather and synthetics in a scratch and tear-resistant form with vents."

But don't be fooled by the clothes. What's more apt to give away one's seriousness about cycling is the on-bike computer that monitors your heart, keeps track of time and distance and basically "tells you when you're running out of gas," Martinen said.

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although one size fits all.

There's the mountain bikes or cross-country bikes that are great for hill climbing because they're lightweight with a stiff frame and either have no suspension or front suspension.

The downhill-style bike has hydraulic disk brakes and six to eight inches of suspension in the front and rear. At 50 pounds, the weight is a drawback, but it's built for speed and strength, Heaver said.

The dual-suspension or "free ride" bikes are lighter than downhill bikes but heavier than the BMX. They have good traction and are best just for having fun.

The hybrid bike is great for an older crowd, those with bad backs or those commuting, Heaver suggested, because it provides an upright, relaxed seating position and bigger wheels and frame.

The cruiser class bike or "beach cruiser," a low rider with no gears and a big saddle seat, is also just for fun or looking cool, he said.

Plus there are tricycles, unicycles and more.

Fortunately, all bike parts are interchangeable, so one can upgrade at any time.

Speeds range from 15 to 27.

And don't forget the cycling shorts, ranging from spandex to ones that look like regular cotton shorts with the shammy, crotch padding built in.

Jerseys come in full sleeves, short sleeves, vests and halter-top styles.

Footwear can be conventional "skate" shoes or running shoes or SPD shoes featuring cleats that lock into bike pedals.

Those younger than 18 are also required by law to wear a helmet.

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