

# GETTING STARTED

Your guide to cycling in London



## WHO WE ARE

The London Cycling Campaign is a volunteer-led, community based organisation working to make London a world-class cycling city. Since 1978, we've been improving facilities, providing information and raising the profile of cycling across London. With over 10,000 members, we are the largest urban cycling organisation in the world.

## WHAT WE DO

**We bring about real improvements for cyclists** in London. Among our key campaigning issues are better conditions for cycling in London, increased provision of cycle parking, and more cycle training in schools and communities. See [www.lcc.org.uk/campaigns](http://www.lcc.org.uk/campaigns) for more information.

Our **local groups** are made up of LCC members who campaign on a borough level, as well as organising rides and events and providing expert advice to local authorities on routes and facilities.

The **Community Cycling Fund for London (in which LCC is a partner)** allows community groups to apply for up to £5,000 for cycling projects that will

encourage, support and promote cycling in their community: see [www.lcc.org.uk/community](http://www.lcc.org.uk/community) for more information.

Our **free public enquiry line** staffed by cyclists, comprehensive website and information leaflets on everything from bike maintenance to cycling with children means new and experienced cyclists alike have access to useful advice.

**We help people start and keep cycling** through our membership package which includes free third party insurance, discounts in over 90 bike shops across London, free delivery of our bi-monthly magazine London Cyclist and more. Join today: [www.lcc.org.uk/join](http://www.lcc.org.uk/join)

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Dean Gillon

Cycling is the most efficient means of getting around London. For journeys under 2 miles, travelling by bike is quicker than car, bus, tube, train or taxi. You can easily cover 5 miles in half an hour and be confident that you'll arrive on time. It's also much cheaper, saving you the costs of expensive public transport or petrol and parking. Not only that, but by cycling regularly you'll lose weight, get fitter, and cut down your risk of heart attacks, high blood pressure and other illnesses.

It's a great way of seeing the city and finding new places, and don't be put off by the people who tell you the roads are dangerous: you're more likely to hurt yourself doing DIY at home than cycling. If you're concerned, cycle training is a great way of boosting your skills and confidence, and the free London Cycle Guides (see p.13) are perfect to uncover routes that suit your level of cycling skill.



Jeremy Hughes

First things first – you'll need to get hold of a bike. First, decide what kind of riding you'll be doing in order to pick the right bike for you. If you're looking for a bike to go riding off-road at the weekends, you might want to buy a mountain bike, but if you'll mostly be riding on the road, a hybrid or road bike will be more appropriate. See our leaflet 'Buying a Bike' for more information on different types of bike: you can download it from [www.lcc.org.uk/info](http://www.lcc.org.uk/info) or order a copy by calling 020 7234 9310. This leaflet also has advice on buying a second hand bike.

## A bike

It's a good idea to try out a few bikes and sizes before you buy to make sure you get the right one: your bike shop should be able to advise you on fit. Remember, if you're an LCC member you can get discounts on bikes and accessories in many bike shops across London – some people make up the cost of membership with their first purchase. Have a look at [www.lcc.org.uk/membership](http://www.lcc.org.uk/membership) for information on how to join and participating bike shops.

## Lock

Locks come in many different styles and strengths, but as a general rule it's a good idea to spend between 10-20% of the value of your bike on a lock, and to use more than one lock if possible. Cheap cable locks can be cut through very easily, but heavier, more expensive ones are a good bet, as are D locks. D locks can usually be attached to your frame so you don't have to carry them around on your person. Have a look at our leaflet 'Bike Security' for more information on types of lock and how to secure your bike safely.



Rosie Collins

## Toolkit and pump

Basic bike tools are compact and inexpensive – regular cyclists carry a pump, puncture repair kit and a multi-tool spanner. It's a good idea to learn how to mend a puncture and it's not as complicated as it sounds – take a look at our leaflet 'Cycle Maintenance' for a guide. To fix a puncture you'll need a puncture repair kit or spare inner tube (you can buy these in any bike shop; the numbers on your tyre wall will tell you what size you need); a pump – a mini pump is the best for when you're on the go, and it needs to be set up for the valves on your inner tubes (either Presta or Schraeder; ask in your bike shop if you're unsure); a set of tyre levers (plastic is better than metal); and unless you have quick release, an allen key or spanner to remove your wheels. A multi-tool is a good investment – these usually have a set of allen keys, screwdrivers and other useful tools built in.



## Lights

Legally you must have a front white light and a red rear light when cycling at dusk or at night and a rear reflector and pedal reflectors for all cycling. All new bikes should be sold with bells. It is not illegal to ride without a bell, but they are very useful for alerting people (especially pedestrians) to your presence.



Rosie Collins



Adrian Lewis

## Mudguards and rack

The bike you choose may come equipped with mudguards, but if it doesn't you may want to buy some: they will protect you from road spray and mud in the wet (and protect the cyclists behind you too). You may also want to invest in a rack and perhaps a set of panniers – these make it easier to carry things around with you.

## Helmet

It's not compulsory to wear a helmet to cycle in London, but some people choose to. If you do choose to wear a helmet, be aware that wearing a helmet does not prevent collisions. For more information on effectiveness of cycle helmets and research into this subject, see [www.lcc.org.uk/campaigns](http://www.lcc.org.uk/campaigns).

For those who do choose to wear a helmet, it is important to ensure that it is fitted properly and of good quality. If you buy a helmet, make sure it's the right size and comfortable. If you're not sure how to adjust the helmet yourself, then make sure you buy it from a shop where the staff can help you get a good (close) fit.

## Insurance

It's a good idea to get insurance for your bike before you start cycling on it, especially if it's new – new bikes are often targeted by thieves. Your bike may already be covered under possessions insurance – if this is the case, make sure you read the terms and conditions carefully. Some insurance companies will only cover the bicycle (not accessories) and some will only cover your bike if it's locked up with



a lock of a certain grade – see our leaflets 'Bike Security' and 'Protection: Insurance and Incidents' for more info on insurance and locks. LCC members have access to a special deal on theft insurance, and they're automatically covered for third party insurance if someone makes a claim against them – give us a call or have a look at [www.lcc.org.uk/membership](http://www.lcc.org.uk/membership) for more information.

It's also a good idea to register your bike on [www.immobilise.com](http://www.immobilise.com), which is the world's largest possession register and is used by the police. It's free to register and means the police have a better chance of reuniting you with your bike if it's stolen and recovered.

Rosie Collins

## STARTING OUT

Before you cycle anywhere, it's a good idea to get into the habit of checking your bike. Remember, these checks are only the bare essentials – have a look at our leaflet 'Cycle Maintenance' for more detailed information on looking after, checking out and servicing your bike.



Paula Salischiker

### Getting ready

- Check that your tyres are pumped up – most people under-inflate their tyres, which makes cycling more difficult and heightens the risk of punctures.
- Make sure your tyres are not worn, as worn tyres puncture easily and can be slippery in the wet.

- Check your brakes – squeeze each lever in turn and push the bike forwards. The brake and gear cables should both be taut. If the brakes are not effective or the cables are slack, have a look at our leaflet 'Cycle Maintenance' or take your bike to a bike shop.
- Clean your bike, especially the gears and chain. Oil your chain and any other exposed moving parts after cleaning; this will keep your bike running smoothly.
- Check the height of your saddle and handlebars. Many people have their saddles too low as they like the convenience of being able to put their foot down to steady the bike; however, having a saddle that's too low means your knees will be excessively bent and can cause discomfort, and also means the saddle, rather than your legs, carry more of your weight, which is likely to increase saddle discomfort. Your leg should be almost straight at the bottom of the pedal stroke. If you're not happy starting out without being able to easily touch the ground, start off lower and raise the saddle gradually as your confidence grows. You can raise or lower your saddle with an allen key or a spanner (unless your saddle is quick release, in which case you won't need either).





Pollards Hill Cyclists

## On your bike



Alix Stredwick

Once you're satisfied that your bike is ready is ready for you to ride, it's time to get started. If you haven't cycled much before, find yourself a traffic-free environment to start off in such as your local park. You might want to take a more experienced friend with you for help and advice.

Begin by familiarising yourself with the brakes and gears. If you are using standard derailleurs gears, you can only change gear while you are pedalling. This means you should learn to anticipate when you will need to change down or up – for example, if you are approaching red traffic lights, you should change down in anticipation of setting off from a stop with lower pedal resistance so you can get away quickly.

Try riding single-handedly so that you are able to make hand signals confidently and practise looking behind you while still travelling in a straight line: try it with both hands on the handlebars, then on the side that you're turning, try taking your hand off the handlebar (you'll find you have greater manoeuvrability like this). Make sure you practise looking over both shoulders – you'll mostly need to look over your right shoulder, but sometimes left is essential.

Then start tackling obstacles, turns and uneven surfaces before venturing out onto the roads.

## THE NEXT STEPS

Before you start cycling in traffic, we recommend that you have a look at the Highway Code for up to date rules and regulations for cyclists. Most rules that apply to motorists also apply to cyclists, but there are some situations where cyclists can do things that motorists can't and vice versa. Remember, it's illegal to cycle on pavements that are not signposted for shared use with pedestrians, and it's illegal to cycle through red lights. Cyclists can cycle on all roads except motorways and some tunnels.

### Cycle training



If possible, get some cycle training to improve your skills and confidence. Cycle training is useful for beginners, returning cyclists and even old hands. Many local authorities offer free or subsidised cycle training to people who live, work or study in the borough: visit your local council's website to see what's available to you, or call the LCC office on 020 7234 9310.

If you're feeling confident enough to try cycling on the roads without cycle training, we recommend reading our booklet 'Cycle Sense' or a book such as John Franklin's Cyclecraft, which is required reading for all cycle training instructors.



## Cycling with a group

Cycling with a friend or group is another great way to boost your confidence. LCC local groups run rides across London which anyone can join in with – have a look at [www.lcc.org.uk/rides](http://www.lcc.org.uk/rides) for more

information, or find out what your local group is planning. There are short, easy rides as well as longer ones, so you'll be able to find something that suits you.

You could also contact your local group to find out if anyone would be happy to ride a route with you – for example to show you a good route to work. Local groups often have e-groups which you can post your request on - you can find contact information for all the groups in the Local Groups section of [www.lcc.org.uk](http://www.lcc.org.uk).

Or how about contacting people you work with to find out if anyone cycles a similar route to you?

Pollards Hill  
Cyclists

Jeremy  
Hughes



## CONFIDENCE AND SAFETY ON THE ROAD

Cycling with confidence and with an awareness of other road users can make a significant difference to how safe you will be on the road. If you are new

to cycling it is a good idea to plan your route in advance. Start on quieter roads and take your time: if you are cycling somewhere that will be busy during the week, then try it out at a weekend to familiarise yourself with the route first.

You should ride assertively, placing yourself on the road so that other road users can see you. Signal your intentions clearly to other road users: this will enable them to predict your movements and take these into account.



Rosie Collins

## Cycle lanes and cycling near parked cars

You may choose to use cycle lanes but you do not have to ride in them and you should not cycle in them if they appear unsafe in any way (they may be blocked or covered in rubbish, for example). You are entitled to take the whole lane, as is any road user. Do not feel you have to ride in the gutter.

If you are cycling past parked cars, be aware that doors may be opened in your path. You should leave at least one metre between yourself and any parked cars, as it is not always possible to predict when a car door will open.

## Junctions and Heavy Goods Vehicles

Take special care around junctions and roundabouts, when joining a main road from a side street or driveway, and when

in the vicinity of heavy goods vehicles. Though collisions are rare, most occur at junctions and heavy goods vehicles are particularly dangerous when turning.

Heavy goods vehicles may swing in an unexpected manner (i.e. turning right before they turn left) and cut corners when they are turning, and their drivers may have reduced visibility, so always give them extra space and never ride up the left hand side of these vehicles.

## Pavements and pedestrians

You should not cycle on pavements unless they are signposted as being for shared usage. Wherever you are cycling, and especially when using shared usage paths, take care and be considerate when cycling around pedestrians.



## GETTING AROUND

The London Cycle Guides are a set of 19 maps covering London and the surrounding areas, developed by LCC and Transport for London. They show official cycle routes as well as quieter roads recommended by cyclists and off-road routes, so they're perfect for planning a



route anywhere – whether you're looking for a route to work or a traffic-free leisure ride. You can order them for free via [www.lcc.org.uk](http://www.lcc.org.uk), [www.tfl.gov.uk](http://www.tfl.gov.uk) or by calling 020 7222 1234.

### Transport for London Journey Planner

The TfL Cycles online journey planner can be useful for mapping routes as it makes use of official and advisory cycle routes. However, it may not always find the best or most direct route. Visit the TfL website to map your route: [www.tfl.gov.uk](http://www.tfl.gov.uk).

## Getting to work



Jeremy Hughes

If you want to use your bike to get to work, have a look at our leaflet 'Cycling to Work'. It's full of useful information on how to encourage your workplace to be more

cycle-friendly and much more. You can download the leaflet from [www.lcc.org.uk/info](http://www.lcc.org.uk/info) or order a copy by calling 020 7234 9310.



Dean Gillon

## Doing the shopping

Doing the shopping on your bike is much easier than you'd think – no fighting for a parking space, or taking lots of bags on crowded public transport. The most comfortable options are a trailer or panniers. Trailers can be expensive, but are a good investment – a well-built trailer will last for years. They may not be ideal for use on busy roads. Panniers are a cheaper option and can take a lot of shopping – usually about 16-18 litre capacity per pannier. See our leaflet 'Travelling with your bike' for more advice on carrying loads.



Adrian Lewis

## Getting the kids to school

Doing the school run by bike, whether the kids are in a trailer, on a trailerbike, on a tandem or on their own bike, is a great way of ensuring they're getting exercise and keeping healthy. See our leaflet 'Cycling with Children' for tips on gear, getting the kids on bikes and getting your school cycle-friendly.

## CONTACTS

### London Cycling Campaign

Find this info and more on the LCC website, including listings of shops that offer a discount to LCC members and a list of second bike shops.

**t:** 020 7234 9310

**w:** [www.lcc.org.uk/info](http://www.lcc.org.uk/info)

### Transport for London

The London Cycle Guides produced by LCC and TfL include addresses of bike shops across London. Order them for free from the website or by phone.

**t:** 020 7222 1234

**w:** [www.tfl.gov.uk](http://www.tfl.gov.uk)

### Department for Transport

Find out more information about the Cycle to Work scheme.

**t:** 020 7944 8300

**w:** [www.dft.gov.uk](http://www.dft.gov.uk)

### Cycle Training UK

Cycle Training UK is a not-for-profit workers' co-operative promoting cycling for all. They run a selection of maintenance courses on which LCC members can get a discount.

**t:** 020 7231 6005

**w:** [www.cycletraining.co.uk](http://www.cycletraining.co.uk)

### Immobilise

Immobilise is the world's largest possession ownership register, used by UK police forces to reunite recovered property with its owners. Register your bike on the database for free.

**w:** [www.immobilise.com](http://www.immobilise.com)

## MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

### Free London Cyclist magazines

For all the news affecting cyclists in the city plus features, reviews, maintenance tips, great rides and offers.

### Free third party insurance

Covers you for up to £2million worth of damages if you injure someone or damage their property.

### Up to 10% off bike gear

You'll get great discounts at bike shops throughout London where you can save money on everything from a new bike to a puncture repair kit.

### Free legal advice

If you ever find yourself involved in an accident you can call any one of our cyclist-friendly solicitors for free advice.

### A world class cycling city

LCC is the only organisation campaigning and lobbying exclusively to ensure the best possible routes, facilities and services for people who cycle in London.

**PLUS** special deals on theft insurance, discounts on cycle maintenance training, free leisure rides, events and campaigns in and around your borough.

# ABOUT THESE LEAFLETS

There are 13 information booklets in this series.

## **Getting started**

**Buying a bike**

**Getting started on a bicycle**

**Cycling for people with disabilities**

**Cycle Sense**

## **Workplace**

**Cycling to work**

**A guide for employers**

**Parking and storage**

## **Leisure**

**Leisure rides**

**Cycling with children**

**Travelling with your bicycle**

## **Practical**

**Cycle maintenance**

**Bike security**

**Protection: insurance and incidents**

These leaflets can be downloaded from [www.lcc.org.uk/info](http://www.lcc.org.uk/info) or ordered from the LCC office by calling 020 7234 9310.

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Many thanks to Che Sutherland, Tom Bogdanowicz and Rosie Downes for their contributions to these leaflets.

## **Get more out of cycling in London**

Join the London Cycling Campaign to save money and get all the support you need to cycle in London - from free and specialised insurance, updates on the latest cycle routes and social rides, to London Cyclist magazine, the essential read for everyone who cycles in London.

Add to this the discounts you'll get in bike shops and on cycle training and you'll see why LCC membership is as necessary to you as your pedals.

In turn your membership will help us to make your cycling safer, quicker and more pleasant around London: we are constantly lobbying and campaigning on your behalf to win real improvements that affect us all.

This edition published in 2007. Many thanks to Martin Ireland who wrote the original edition of this leaflet.



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**cycling... good for London, good for you!**