



## CYCLING FACT SHEET No. 17

# Wide choice can make buying a bike daunting

The festive season has arrived and some of you may have decided to purchase a bicycle for yourself or as a present for someone else.

With no shortage of models on the market, making the right choice can seem a bit daunting. Selecting the type or style of bike will depend upon where the owner is likely to do most of their riding and for what purpose.

Racing bikes are designed for speed on hard, smooth paved surfaces such as roads. Drop handlebars allow the rider to adopt a streamlined position that keeps the head low and enables the legs to apply maximum power to the pedals. A thin, rigid frame and narrow tyres make racers difficult to use on gravel or uneven ground.

Mountain and BMX bikes have a much thicker frame and wide tyres, and the riding position is more upright to aid balance at the lower speeds experienced during off-road work. Many come with a suspension system that softens the ride over rough terrain.

Hybrids offer a good compromise. They are comfortable to ride on hard surfaces but can also handle some of the less rugged off-road work and are also a good choice for general commuting, because they are less vulnerable to potholes than racing bikes. If the cyclist is riding mainly on shared paths, where speed is not required, this style of bike is ideal.

Regardless of the type of bicycle, finding a good fit is essential. Seats and handlebars can be easily adjusted but the frame size is fixed. When you straddle an adult's racing, touring or hybrid bike with feet flat, the distance between your crotch and the frame's top bar should be at least three centimetres. If the bike does not have a horizontal top bar (such as some models for females) you will need to imagine that one is in place. For mountain bikes, the distance between crotch and top bar should be about eight centimetres.

When buying for children, choose a model that suits the child's current age and size. Do not get a bicycle that the child will "grow into", because riding an oversized bike can be dangerous.



The child should be able to place the balls of both feet on the ground and also reach the handlebars comfortably. When straddling the bike with feet flat, there should be a clearance of three or four centimetres between crotch and horizontal top bar (or where such a bar would be).

Department stores stock a good range of bicycles, but these tend to be mass-produced models at the lower end of the market and are often sold in packs that you must assemble yourself.

Bike shops also stock a large range across all price categories, and have professional staff that can help you select a pre-assembled model and then provide advice about ongoing maintenance.

Remember to buy an approved helmet. A rear vision mirror is also highly recommended. Other accessories such as carrier racks, baskets, mudguards, water bottle cages, locks and a pump can be useful.

***This fact sheet is one of a series dealing with the use of bicycles for recreation and transport in Western Australia. The series looks at a range of cycling-related topics including ride routes, touring tips, maintenance, safety, road rules, insurance and product reviews. You can find more cycling fact sheets online at [www.transport.wa.gov.au/cycling](http://www.transport.wa.gov.au/cycling)***

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