

How to buy a good bike

Three main types of bicycles are sold today. Kids prefer the "stingray" style, with small wheels and high handlebars. Adults can pick between the three-speed "touring" bike and the racing-style ten-speed.

Touring bikes have enclosed gearboxes in the rear wheel. Ten-speeds have a chain switching system called a "derailleur". The enclosed gears are tougher, but harder to fix when they do break. Other differences are found in the seat (broad in the touring bike, narrow in the ten-speed) and the handlebars, which are higher and

broader on the touring bike. Ten-speeds are more efficient and usually lighter, hence they are recommended for long distance trips. They are harder to adjust to if you use your bike infrequently.

Where is the best place to buy? "The most important thing is to deal with a place that has a service department," says Jim Roberts, of Western Auto in Mount Joy. Buying from a large "discount" house can lead to problems. Even if you save five or ten dollars on the bike, you may have to throw it out later when you can't get service or a spare part.

Most "discount" bikes are made in Korea or Hong Kong, and big stores don't stock all the ball bearings and crank pins that may be needed to keep your investment alive. American-made bikes have a more stable parts availability.

Paul Snyder of Columbia Hardware, Marietta, told us that buyers should check out the guarantee on a bike. If a store won't offer a decent one, don't buy from them.

Although reputable dealers with service facilities and experience may charge slightly more than the large chain stores, they will have been worth dealing with when the bike is in need of repair, which it will be sooner or later.

Bicycles come in various frame sizes, which are measured in inches. To see if it's right for you, straddle the bike. Your heels should just touch the floor. If the bike is too big or too small, it will be difficult and possibly unsafe to ride. Paul Snyder, a bike safety expert, says that you shouldn't buy your child a bike he or she will "grow into." Your child might never grow that big if you follow this practice.

Bicycles vary in weight (for a given style and frame size). Generally speaking, the lighter ones are more expensive, but better made and easier to use because you have that much less weight to pedal up the hills. Very expensive ten-speeds are miracles of weight-saving. They make extensive use of magnesium alloys and special steels, and have exotic tires that are sewn onto the hubs.

One feature to look for is "center-pull" brakes. They're easy to identify: The pull wire lines up with the center of the wheel rim. This type is much easier to adjust than the "Side-pull" type.

More expensive ten-speeds have aluminum wheel rims to save weight. They have snob appeal but are fragile compared to the ordinary steel rims.



Jim Roberts displays a 'Sting-ray' or 'moto-cross' bike.

Bikes for transportation

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While most adults either disdain the bicycle as a kid's toy, or use one for recreation and exercise, the two-wheeled machines can often be used to commute or shop effectively. In town a bicycle is often as fast as a car, and you don't have to worry about parking.

Why should you consider a bicycle? Here are a few reasons:

1. Bicycling is cheap. A bike costs about a thirtieth of what a car does, and maintenance is almost nothing.

2. It's very healthy to ride a bike. If you bicycle to work every day, it's as good for you as jogging, and doesn't take time out of your day.

3. Bicycles don't pollute the air, create junkyards, ruin roads, or deplete energy resources.

4. You'll appreciate the scenery more, because you're going slower and don't have to worry about running over a dog or child.

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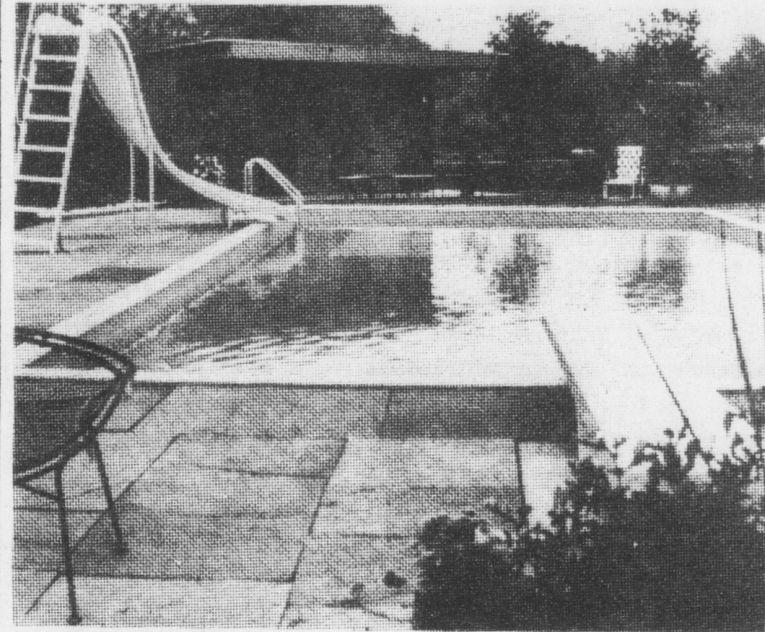
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