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Expert Chain Gang

Expert Answers
 Starting Training for Touring

Cindi's Question.

We are a family new at bicycling. We have everybody all set and we are excited about touring. How long of a distance do you think beginners should start with?

Ethan Gelber's Answer.

My fellow Chain Gang friend Steve Jones recently answered a question similar to this about mountain biking. [His response](#) can be boiled down to two words: Start slow. I must agree with him.



Most sports and exercise programs involve allowing time for your muscles first to adjust to a new activity and then to get strong in a way that supports prolonged exertion when involved in that activity. In almost all cases, overexertion should be avoided since it can lead to injury.

Cycling (in all its forms) is no different. It may not initially feel like you are lifting weights or making any extraordinary demands on your body, but you are. If you bike more than a few days in a row (even a short distance), you will discover that your legs, your butt, your back and shoulders, and more all begin to ache. And you wouldn't want to ache the wrong way or push the limits in such a way that might lead to chronic ailments or muscle strain.

So, what kinds of distances should you ponder as a beginner? Really short ones. No more than a few miles. And you should pedal easily, thinking about your form so that you learn the right way to pedal right from the start. You should also stay away from really tough hills.

It might sound silly to begin your "training" by going slowly over a short distance on flat terrain, but this is probably what you should do at the start. If, especially right at the beginning, you are biking so hard, fast, or long that you feel uncomfortable, you are giving too

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much. It is essential that you give your muscles time to adjust and grow. Then you can punish them all you want.

Try pedaling between two and five miles five days a week (Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday), reserving the longer rides for the weekend. You can slowly increase the mileage as you get stronger, but don't be overeager. Cap the ride length at 10 miles the second week, and then 30 miles the third week, and so on. Slowly add hills and increase your riding and spinning pace.

Before you know it you will feel the results. The two miles you panted your way through will zip by as you go out on a 50-mile ride.

One more thing, you mention that you are a family. Does this mean that you are adults and young people biking together? If this is the case, you should be even more careful to start slowly. Although young muscles will recover more quickly, they also run the risk of overuse injuries at the start.

Basically, take it easy. Slow enjoyment at the start will make it possible to live a long, happy, and healthy life in that narrow, perineum-mashing saddle we love to hate.

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