

# Off-road bicycling: It's a family affair

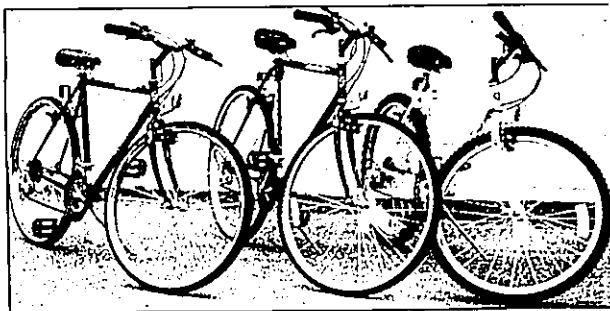
By Janice Tiger-Kramer  
special writer

ONCE UPON a time, bikes were mostly for kids — then came the 1980s. Just leave it to the folks in California (who just for fun put sophisticated gears on those 1950-style bikes) to come up with a revolutionary bicycle designed to ride off-road to places usually accessible only to hikers.

Cycle enthusiasts are heading to local bike shops in record numbers at holiday time and year-round to check out popular mountain bikes, and variations of it, made for off-road riding, a rapidly growing form of fun and fitness for adults and kids.

The mountain bike is a demileur bike (a gearing system that moves the chain from one combination of chainring and sprocket to another) with 12 to 21 speeds, flat handlebars, a wide seat, a comfortable, upright riding position and chubby tires with an aggressive tread pattern for off-road riding.

The hybrid bike was designed for less rugged travel, but a less aggressive tire tread gives a smoother ride on the street. The bike has fewer gears than the mountain bike and tires are thinner. To make the choice more confusing, the hybrid model has taller, thinner tires than the city bike but the gear ratio is similar. The tire tread on



SHARON LEMIEUX/staff photographer

Off-road bikes like, from left, the city bike, hybrid bike and mountain bike take riders to places once accessible only to hikers. The mountain bike's aggressive tire tread is ideal for a rough terrain. The hybrid bike is designed for less-rugged travel. The city bike has shorter, chubbier tires for a smooth ride on the road. All three models have a similar gear ratio.

the city bike has a center ridge for a smoother ride.

"BUYING A bike is like buying shoes," said Don Moore, owner of D&D Bike Shop in Westland and Northville. "The rider needs to come into the store to be properly fitted."

By fitted, Moore means choosing the right bike (yes, 10 speeds still are available) and bike frame — the mountain bike comes in about six. If

the bike is a holiday gift, Moore suggests bringing the rider in to choose the model. True, the gift won't be a complete surprise, but the rider will enjoy it for a lifetime, he said.

"Biking is for families today. It's a good, clean sport," Moore said. "Bikes might be more expensive today, but you don't pay for insurance or licenses, and with maintenance they don't wear out."

D&D Bike shop sells Giant, Cannondale and Trek mountain and hybrid bikes, most in the price range of \$189-\$299. Kids mountain bikes (with 20 or 24-inch frames) are \$125-\$250.

At Farmington Bike Shop, mountain or city bikes outsell 10-speeds 10 to one.

"The fatter tire gives a more stable ride when the bike is forced off the road or when a rider wants to go off-road. Riders don't want to be hunched over anymore," said John Reed, co-owner.

BESIDES GIVING a more comfortable ride, Reed said parents feel safer attaching a child carrier or child trailer to the mountain, hybrid or city bike.

Farmington Bike Shop sells Schwinn mountain bikes, mostly in the price range of \$330, or \$1,200 for a hi-tech racing model. Schwinn's city bike, which currently outsells the mountain bike, is \$210-\$300. The trailer, with space for two kids, is \$300.

At Sterling Schwinn Cycling and Fitness, Rochester, mountain and hybrid bikes make up 85 percent of all sales.

"People want a more versatile bike, one with a stable ride on or off the road," said Mark Stone, manager.

After selecting the bike, experts say don't forget to buy an "approved" helmet made of Lexan or another hard plastic. Most kids and adult helmets are \$39-\$60 at bike shops.

## HOLIDAY GIFT GIVING

Somewhere in time, Thanksgiving became the official kickoff for the holiday shopping season, somewhat crowding the day's original intent to commemorate the Pilgrims' celebration of the good harvest of 1621. So after feasting on turkey and giving thanks to life's bounty, take a moment to see what's cooking on the gift-giving front. This special holiday gift guide, appearing today in all 12 Observer & Eccentric newspapers, is designed to inspire you and lift you into the spirit of the gift-giving season. It's chock full of new ideas as the Christmas and Hanukkah seasons shift into high gear from what's new in toys to the latest in fashions to a sampling in holiday recipes. It's worth reading before hitting the shopping malls and plazas or your favorite neighborhood center. I know you'll find it informative and interesting. Happy holidays!

— Bob Sklar

Assistant managing editor

### ABOUT THE COVER:

The gouache painting, "Christmas Wishes," was created by nationally renowned artist-illustrator David McCall Johnston of Farmington Hills. The Depression-era scene, depicting two children wishing to win a contest for a bear, originally accompanied a Christmas story published in Good Housekeeping. For the last 10 years, Johnston has painted holiday compositions for the magazine. "Christmas Wishes" is owned by an anonymous private collector.

Bob Sklar coordinated this special section, with assistance from special writers Denise Lucas and Janice Tiger-Kramer. Graphics illustrated by Green Dietrich designed the cover. O&E representatives David Baker and Audrey Roof coordinated advertising. Copy News Service provided copy. Direct queries to Bob Sklar, 953-2113.



## Holiday Sale!!!

This holiday season give a cozy and colorful warm-up suit from **Tennis Time!!** For Mom, Dad and all the kids, ages 12 months and up! Come in and select from racks and racks of sale-priced warm-ups by **FILA • ELLESSE • SERGIO TACCHINI • TODD • HEAD • TAIL & ULTRASPORT** and we'll tie all your gifts up with **Tennis Time's** gorgeous complimentary holiday wrap!!!

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