

Finding the perfect fit

Beware of nagging pain in the saddle

By Jordan D. Metzl, MD

In a recent discussion with my mom, who is a psychologist, she made an interesting comment. “Jordy,” she said (she is the only person who can call me Jordy), “finding the right bike fit is like finding the right woman to marry.” “Huh?” I asked. She continued, “It only takes one—with the perfect fit you can ride off happily into the sunset.”



OK. My mom is a bit long on advice, but the point here is valid. A properly fit bike can be a life-changing issue. Having just transitioned to a new bike this season, I am living proof of the merits of bike fit.

If a bike fitter knows what they’re doing, they will recognize that every person is built differently: some people have more lumbar flexibility and can tolerate more forward flexion in the fit. Some athletes have better hamstring flexibility and can tolerate more extension in knee during the pedal stroke. Still others have more or less rotation of the hip and can tolerate more or less flexion of the hip during pedaling. The point is that everyone is built differently, so considering the specific anatomy of the athlete is essential.

So now the bike is properly fitted and you have left the store with your shiny baby. The key now: ride, ride, ride. A good bike fitter tells you to come back in 150 or 200 miles to tweak the position, as needed. For the athlete, it’s important to recognize that providing feedback to the fitter is essential. Keeping a log of what hurts, how it hurts and when it hurts is important.

And what are the warning signs? With dating, if she starts making fun of your mother, putting arsenic in your food or flirting with



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your friends, watch out. And with bike fittings, look out for pain. The pitfalls of a poor bike fit can be many, but several warning signs include Achilles tendonitis, patellofemoral knee pain (pain underneath the kneecap), numbness and pain in the privates after rides and severe back and neck pain after riding. In each of these scenarios, there can be some break-in problems, but often, these are indicative of an improperly fit bike.

Common problems include a seat position that is either too high or low, an aero position that is too aggressive or a top-tube that is too long. With each injury I see from an improperly fit bike, there is no exact cause. Meaning, there is generally not one specific reason the injury occurs. The positional causes of injury are multiple, so its best to take

your bike into the store with an idea of the problem you are having and then discuss it with the fitter. A good fitter uses what you are telling him or her and incorporates it into the changes he or she is making. Trial and error is the key.

If it all goes well, things work out for the best. It’s important to feel as though your bike fits you seamlessly. If you pay careful attention to how you go about the process, this will be the outcome and you can ride off into the sunset with certainty. ▲

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