



Like-A-Bike: Like it or Not

Julie Henning

I'm feeling a bit swindled and sheepish at the same time—confession alert. I started to write about the success we've had teaching out kids to learn to ride a bicycle using a "like-a-bike" (*also known as a push bike, a no-pedal bike, or a pedal-less bike*) – introducing them to the idea as a toddler, after mastering their tricycles, yet before venturing to the big-boy/big-girl bike.

Having viewed a television segment on kids biking in the Netherlands some years ago (on *Sesame Street* of all places), we were fascinated by the idea of teaching kids to master balance before mixing momentum with pedals. We scoured eBay for a like-a-bike (it appears that there are many makes and models, some metal and some wooden, in quite the range of prices). We found ours (*unused*) on eBay from a family in New York for about \$70.

Up until today I've felt quite trendy and European (*like-a-bikes are not well known in the Midwestern mainstream bike community*); but I just discovered most people simply REMOVE the pedals from their bikes, accomplishing the same purpose (*saving money and the need for two bikes-doh!*). Our like-a-bike was easy to assemble, but the alternate does seem quite obvious. Maybe we let the internet get the better of us? Surely *Sesame Street* had good intentions, and the Netherlands kid seemed to be having a great time. Isn't hindsight great?

However, for our family, and with our particular like-a-bike, we experienced the benefit of the smaller (*lower-to-the-ground*) frame and the absence of gears and other things to collect dust and add grease to pant cuffs. Because we have three kids: one on the tricycle, one on the like-a-bike, and one in a big-boy size, the progression has been laid out in sequential order. I'm not sure this exactly qualifies as a rite of passage, but at least no one argues (*yet*).

After a few months figuring out his balance and developing his confidence, our big-boy biker had a mostly seamless transition into his (*shhh...girl-model*) Specialized kid's frame. Our next goal was to keep the bike weight to a minimum and stick with a brand we've come to trust. Because he enjoyed running up and coasting down our smallish backyard hill on the like-a-bike, planting his feet for balance and breaking (*as necessary -say right before impact with the neighbor's fence*), he barreled right down a big hill at the city park on his maiden pedal-bike voyage. I couldn't keep up and it was scary for both of us.



Marie on her Like-A-Bike Photo
Credit: Ron Bennett



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In retrospect, introducing pedals and momentum via an empty, flat, parking lot (*ideally before a bratwurst dinner*), is my advice to anyone looking to keep up with their kid—offering “assistance” by the shoulders and not the handlebars (*steadying with handlebars defeats the whole ability of the child to self-correct their balance they learned with the like-a-bike*).

I’m not an expert on the best age or time-frame for the like-a-bike. But, what I do know is that deciding between training wheels or the “scooter” method is ultimately a decision that needs to work with your budget and the needs of your family. If you only have one kid, maybe this article will eliminate a gear-less, pedal-less bicycle occupying real estate in your garage or storage shed. The fact that we only found one affordable like-a-bike model on eBay may mean two things (1) everyone else is removing their own pedals, or (2) like-a-bikes are growing in popularity. Good luck and good biking. And look for us on eBay in another year or so.

Julie Henning is a freelance writer trapped inside the job description of a Technical Writer. She's also a mom and a 2014 Olympic mountain biker on sabbatical (slightly older and with lots more life insurance). She shares a house with a husband, three kids, a dog, a cat, two fish, and at least one or two field mice (more in the winter). When her 401K resurfaces, she would love to own a mountain bike resort/vineyard with lodging and gourmet food. Until then, she'll stick with Trader Joes and live vicariously through her kids.

If you have comments to this article or a topic you would like to share, please contact: editor@minnesotacyclist.com

Article Published: 05-22-2009