



# Walkers Cycling

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**we understand cycling**

## An Introduction to: Mountain Biking

### Mountain Biking

The world of mountain biking, or MTB, owes much to a bunch of ageing American hippy types. It was their passion for hurtling down Californian mountainsides that led to the development of the specialised MTB machine in the early 1980's.

Mountain bikes now account for the majority of bicycles sold in the UK. The robustly built MTB is designed to cope with anything that off-road riding can throw at it and, ironically, it's that same strength which some riders prefer for navigating the pothole-strewn urban jungle as well. Fat tyres, 26-inch wheels and suspension help to iron out the discomfort of poorly maintained roads.

The MTB has been responsible for introducing many thousands of people to the pleasures of cycling although racing plays a relatively small part in total mountain bike use.

Just like many school-run 4x4 "off-road" vehicles, some mountain bikes never get their tyres muddy. There are however, many MTB riders who like nothing better than getting out and doing it in the countryside – getting a little "grubby" is all part of the fun!

### Mountain Biking for Fun and Fitness

The vast majority of mountain bike owners use their bikes for this purpose. A mountain bike allows the rider to get away from the noise and pollution of traffic choked roads whether it's just for a quick ride in a local park or cycle path or maybe further afield at one of the growing number of venues that exist to cater for leisure mountain biking.

There are a growing number of MTB trails and tracks throughout the UK. Forest Enterprise is just one of many landowners who are recognising and fulfilling the need for dedicated off-road cycling facilities. Many facilities offer a choice of graded trails to suit everyone from the family looking for a gentle, slower paced ride to the enthusiasts keen to test themselves on a more challenging route. Many local authorities produce information leaflets and route maps for their area – check at your local council offices.



### What About MTB Racing?

If competition is what you're after, mountain biking is an excellent introduction to cycle sport. Every level is now catered for from grass roots to elite. Cross-country mountain biking was accepted as an Olympic sport in 1996.

Mountain biking is now one of the biggest participation sports in the UK with events ranging from local to World Championship level. Here in Scotland, Fort William has become a centre

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of excellence in MTB racing with the Highland town regularly hosting UCI World Cup events and the UCI World Championships in 2007.

MTB racers tend to compete less frequently than time trial and road race riders but cater for a larger number of riders. Meetings are often spread over an entire weekend and feature one or more of the following main disciplines:-

- **Cross-country:** Massed start endurance events over rough and varied terrain with climbs, descents and single-track sections. Courses usually consist of a circuit covered one or more times dependent on the category of rider. First to complete the course wins.
- **Cross-country Endurance:** Endurance events are becoming increasingly popular where competitors ride over extended periods – typically 12 or 24 hours. The endurance race is characterised by the course which can be of a point-to-point nature or over many laps of a large circuit. Multi-stage endurance races held over 2 or more days are also becoming popular where the competitors are faced with a variety of terrain.

Endurance events usually offer the entrant the choice of riding solo or as part of a team. Some events can be completed in daylight whilst others involve night riding to inject an additional test of the competitor's riding skills.

- **Downhill:** Self-explanatory really. Riders compete individually, flat out against the clock on a short, steep descent. The courses are normally very challenging. Jumps, bumps, berms and drop-offs all have to be negotiated on the way down.

Specialist, full suspension bikes, a full-face helmet and body armour are the order of the day. Each entrant does a qualifying run from which the start order for the final is determined. In the final, slower competitors start first with the fastest qualifying rider going off last. The fastest rider wins.

- **Dual:** A variation on Downhill that involves riders competing head-to-head in pairs down a short, technically demanding course. Each run is all over in about half a minute with the winner going through to the next round on a straight knockout basis.

Although not officially a contact sport it can become quite "physical" at times! Consequently, although crashes are common and spectacular, injuries are rarely serious. A real crowd pleaser!

- **4-Cross:** This format expands on Dual format where four riders start together and compete on a specially constructed, 4 lane course. The first two to finish go through to the next round until the winner is found.

Each discipline demands a different combination of physical ability and bike handling skills. They all have one thing in common though – mountain bike racing is so much fun it's a wonder it hasn't been banned!

### The Mountain Bike



You don't need a very expensive bike to start mountain biking. For 'proper' off-road capability your mountain bike should have a good spread of gear ratios and wide, knobby tyres. Suspension forks are almost universal while rear suspension is a feature that some riders may specify depending on personal preference and the type of riding being done.

## Walkers Cycling – An Introduction to: Mountain Biking

Mountain biking, in common with every cycling discipline, has seen the evolution over the years of specialised machines which can cost many thousands of pounds. There are machines designed for cross-country, downhill and enduro.

Aerodynamic efficiency is less of an issue on the MTB while strength is essential to cope with the rigours of off-road riding. Lightness is desirable but not at the expense of structural strength! The use of materials such as aluminium alloy, titanium and carbon fibre helps to achieve the desired strength to weight ratio. Disc brakes are now fairly common with hydraulic models appearing even at the cheaper end of the market.

### I Would Like To Try MTB Racing – How Fit Do I Need To Be?



You are likely to start out in one of the fun categories. Fitness is less of an issue in these categories – just ride at your own pace and enjoy the experience. Mountain bikers are generally a friendly bunch who will offer heaps of encouragement, so no one is going to laugh if you don't complete the course. Everyone has to start somewhere - and if, sorry when, the MTB racing bug bites, you'll soon improve.

It is always a good idea to employ the services of a coach when planning any training schedule. Many clubs have one or more qualified coaches in their ranks. The national governing bodies all maintain a register of qualified coaches.

### How Do I Get Started in MTB Racing?

Joining a club is by far the best way into the sport. As well as pure MTB clubs many "traditional" clubs have an MTB section or will have MTB riders in their membership. Club membership opens up opportunities to get help, advice and support from like minded riders and racers. They'll know all the local MTB trails, training runs, races and such like.

Most cross-country event organisers cater for the *sprogs* (young children) and *fun* categories in their events giving newcomers a chance to try MTB racing with the minimum of fuss and expense. The national governing bodies – British Cycling, Scottish Cycling etc. - maintain lists of affiliated MTB and 'MTB Friendly' clubs.

### Joining a Cycling Club

Club membership opens up opportunities to get help, advice and support from like minded riders. Walkers Cycling Club is an Ayrshire based club that aims to encourage participation in all types of leisure and competitive cycling – including mountain biking.

Visit the club web site at [www.walkerscyclingclub.com](http://www.walkerscyclingclub.com)

The national governing bodies – British Cycling, Scottish Cycling, Welsh Cycling Union etc. – maintain lists of affiliated clubs.

### Where to Buy

The best place to buy your mountain bike, accessories and clothing is at a local, independent cycle dealer who should be able to offer a range of good quality products to suit your requirements.

At Walkers Cycling we aim to get people cycling – and keep them cycling. Our customers can benefit from the knowledge and experience our friendly staff have gained doing most types of cycling. We want you to enjoy your cycling as much as we do and can help you choose the best kit for the job.

## Walkers Cycling – An Introduction to: Mountain Biking

### Contacts/Further Information

#### **British Cycling**

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#### **Scottish Cycling**

Caledonia House,  
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Web: [www.scottishcycling.org.uk](http://www.scottishcycling.org.uk)

#### **Welsh Cycling**

Welsh Cycling,  
Wales National Velodrome,  
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Web: [www.welshcycling.co.uk](http://www.welshcycling.co.uk)

#### **British Schools Cycling Association**

Web: [www.bsca.org.uk](http://www.bsca.org.uk)

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