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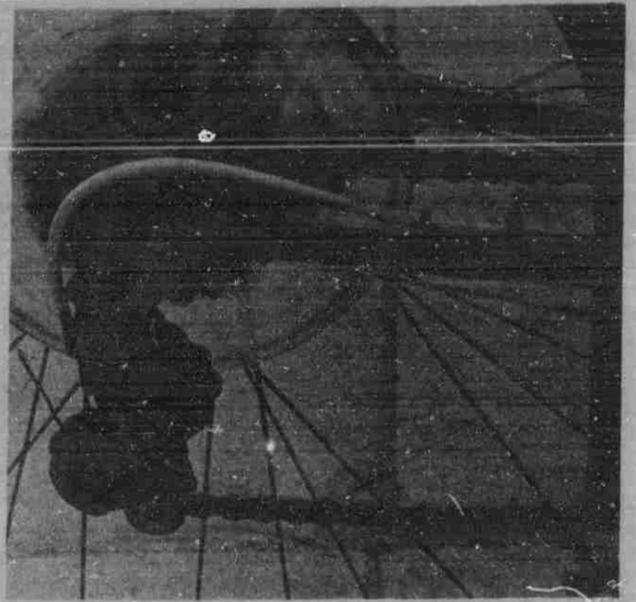
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Local bicycle sales are racing ahead.

Local bike peddlers give tips for buyers

By Charles Johnson

Bicycle sales have increased dramatically in the last few years and, with gasoline at higher prices and in short supply, they should continue to increase rapidly.

As more people look for human-powered vehicles, the careful selection of a bicycle as a means of transportation is more important than ever. Consumers must choose from a myriad of brands, styles and prices.

One bicycle dealer in Lincoln said his store stocks 10-speed bicycles ranging in price from \$105.95 to \$300. This is the general price range for quality touring bicycles, he said, but bikes in other price ranges could be ordered.

The first consideration when buying a bike is the number of gears needed. This should be determined by what use the bicycle will get. *Consumer Guide's* bicycle test report recommends a 10-speed model for anyone commuting or riding further than a few blocks.

Six items should be considered before purchasing a bicycle: lightness, frame, handling ease, comfort, gears and brakes.

According to the January 1974 *Consumer Reports*, a few pounds can make a great difference in the ease of operating a bike. 10-speed bikes available for general use range from about 25- to 45 pounds but competitive racing models are even lighter.

Lighter weight is usually what makes the bike more expensive, Lincoln dealers said. American-made bikes are sturdier than the lighter-weight European models.

"American bikes are made for more abuse," one dealer said. "Anyone who is hard on a bike shouldn't ride an imported bicycle," added another.

Consumer Reports emphasized the need for a rigid bicycle frame. The more rigid the frame, the less effort is wasted by the rider. Men's models have much stronger frames than women's.

Handling ease depends on factors such as sturdiness of the frame and accuracy of wheel alignment. *Consumer Reports* suggests testing the handling ease of bikes by riding with no hands at very low speeds.

The most efficient cycling position has the cyclist leaning forward with his arms pushing forward and down on the handlebars. This riding style is more comfortable over long distances and can only be done with dropped or racing-style handlebars.

Another aspect of comfort is the saddle. Saddles using heavy leather covers held in tension over the seat frame were judged most comfortable by *Consumer Reports*, but hard plastic saddles were rated almost as well.

Fitting the rider to the frame is important, according to the *Consumer Reports* article. A frame measuring nine or 10 inches less than the rider's inseam is recommended. When riding, the leg should be extended almost fully when the ball of the foot is on the pedal in its lowest position.

Gear ratios are computed from the number of teeth on the front and rear sprockets of the gears. The lower the number of the ratio, the easier the bicycle is to pedal but, of course, the slower the rider goes at a given cadence.

Single speed bikes have gear ratios from 66 to 70, three and five speed bikes from 49 to 94, and 10-speed bikes from 33 or 38 to about 100.

One Lincoln dealer emphasized the need for a good derailleur, that is, gear mechanism.

"The type of a derailleur makes a bike more expensive," he said, "but a good one is worth the cost."

Brakes found on all 10-speed models are caliper, or hand-operated brakes. They provide quick, controlled stops, except in wet weather. One Lincoln dealer preferred center-pull brakes to side-pull brakes, which is a difference in the way the brakes are positioned over the wheel. She recommended "good heavy brakes made of good heavy metal."

After choosing a bicycle, one's worries are not over, however. Care and maintenance are important considerations.

Both dealers recommended buying an assembled bike so there would be less chance of something going wrong. The availability of parts also should be considered. Some foreign parts are difficult to obtain, they noted.

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