

Personal Trainers/fitters- First do no harm. Please.

First, let me say there are some fantastic local personal trainers and fitters. People who don't try and fit someone into their own little box of how things should be, without taking into account who and what you are. Dan Smith at Sport Velo & Curtis at Revolution in Fitness are a couple who have done very good work. And Physical Therapists like Todd Norwood who have strong cycling backgrounds plus specific anatomical training that you'd find in a very small number of MDs. They don't try to contort you. They don't show you photos of professional cyclists and say "This is what you should look like." Unless you're already or about to become a pro cyclist.

But for a few others, here's my rant. And I admit it's a rant, fueled by one of several issues lately where I've had to de-program people from things that were either causing them physical damage or taking away from their enjoyment of cycling, or both.

Personal trainers/fitters and "fit": One of my great frustrations is getting someone started in cycling, particularly road cycling, having them really comfortable on their bike, making sure there's no reason they don't want to ride... and then they get involved with a "personal trainer" who tells them they need to drop the stem down, lengthen their reach, and in one recent case, a nose-down saddle because "that's what the pros do."

So yesterday I have a young woman come in complaining of shoulder and neck pain on a bike she recently purchased from us. Her "personal trainer" told her she needed a longer, lower stem (and in fact, she's flexible enough she may be able to get by with that) and also angled her seat 6 degrees down at the nose (I measured it). She was very comfortable before this change in seat angle was made; the "personal trainer" told her that her present discomfort was because her bars were too narrow.

It took some time to gain my customer's confidence and convince her to try the bike after making the seat level (where it used to be); after all, "the pros" ride with it the way the personal trainer had set it up, and what credibility do I have vs someone who knows how "the pros" set up their bikes. But she was willing to try it, and voila, neck & shoulder pain gone. By the way, the theory behind tilting the nose down is that it allows you to rotate your pelvis forward, which gets you lower on the bike without killing your back. There are saddles designed to accomplish this while not shoving you forward (which is what causes the neck & shoulder pain, since you're pushing back on the bars using your arms (which connect to your neck & shoulders) to maintain position.

Personal trainers/fitters and gearing: Here's another one. "You don't need those lower gears. You'll get stronger if you don't use them." How often do I want to strangle someone when I hear a customer say that their personal trainer says this is the wrong bike for them because they shouldn't have lower gears/don't need a triple? Some don't. Many do. We're not all the same. Personally, I use fairly high gears when climbing. Higher than I should be using. But it's not all about me. It's about you. It's about the customer's dreams, the customer's unique strengths and weaknesses that likely have little in common with a Tour de France athlete.

Personal trainers/fitters and pedals: Ohmygosh if I have one more person coming in telling me that their personal trainer said Speedplay pedals were bad because they had too much float... in my opinion, it's nearly impossible to have too much float. Float is good. Float allows your foot to go where it wants to go. Trying to force your foot to do something else can cause significant knee stress. If you want to try and force your foot to track better (not "wobble" on the pedal so much), you can attempt to change lateral alignment and place angled shims between the cleat and shoe. But some people's legs & feet simply aren't going to track straight, and they've been pedaling that way for years without trouble, until someone tells them that's wrong, they've got to get pedals with less float to fix that. (Speedplay, by the way, makes a pedal where you can have it both ways, by just turning a screw. Lots of float, or "zero" float, your choice.)

I've been around long enough to know very well what cycling was like before we had "floating" pedals (which allow your foot to change its angle as the crank rotates)... lots of knee issues. Knee issues which magically went away with floating pedals.

Personal trainers/fitters and misguided ideas about performance vs comfort: This came up the other day when a personal trainer told one of my customers she should be on 23c tires, not 25, because... well, no good reason, just that's what she was told she should be on. Old-school thinking that narrower tires are faster, which has been debunked repeatedly over the past few years. Wider

tires actually have lower rolling resistance (up to a point, and that point includes 25c) in nearly all circumstances. Plus, wider tires are a lot more comfortable on the awful road surfaces we're seeing lately.

No pain/no gain isn't always true: That's really at the core of things. The key to greater efficiency on a bike rarely involves having to contort yourself or ride a bike that's got skinny old-school tires and handlebars set to old-school geometry. Our customers deserve the best, and the best is a lot better than what I grew up with. Spare the pain/spoil the cyclist seems to be the way some of these guys (they always seem to be guys) think. Again, not all. Hopefully not most. But some. Bikes are better now. You can ride faster & further if you're not in pain. It's OK to think like that. Really.

I'm not saying that you're going to make it up Kings Mountain 10 minutes faster without feeling a world of hurt. But that should be "good" hurt, voluntary hurt, the hurt that comes from forcing your mind's will upon your legs and commanding them to push past the pain because that's what you want to do. Voluntary. If you want to go out and ride below that threshold, without pain, you should be able to. You should never walk past your bike and think of it as something uncomfortable or not fun. Yet many people do, because they've been sold a bill of goods, told that, if you're going to do anything worthwhile (their idea of worthwhile) on a bike, you've got to be willing to contort yourself, you've got to buy into the idea that you'll get used to it.

--Mike J, Partner, Chain Reaction Bicycles (veteran of various fit schools, former bike racer, rides 7200 miles a year but wishes for more, believes cyclists come in all shapes & sizes & have all manner of different dreams and it's their dream that's important)