

WHAT MAKES A BIKE WOMEN'S SPECIFIC?

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A bike fit is a personal experience. What works for one person can be drastically different from what works for another. A proper bike fit involves many factors, but is gender one of them?

The cycling industry sees the women's market as untapped, and as manufacturers seek to grow this segment of the market, the purchasing process for female riders can become complicated when it comes to cutting through the marketing hype. So, how does the average consumer discern the difference between thoughtful women's specific design and clever salesmanship? We've found that so-called women's specific bikes loosely fit into one of three categories. Understanding the difference between these three categories will help inform your next purchasing decision.

SIZED DOWN

The sized-down category encompasses bikes that

are basically identical to the men's version, just scaled down, essentially a shift along the size spectrum, a little to the left, with more options that are simply smaller. It's the entry level of the women's specific concept. When you consider that the average frame is constructed to fit the average male, ranging in height from 5-foot-10 to 6 feet tall, the value in a smaller sized frame is evident. Most women fall significantly short of a small man's height, let alone an average-sized man's weight.

WHEN IT WORKS

- If you are looking for a no-frills bike that comes in sizing options tailored to shorter riders.

WHEN IT DOESN'T WORK

- If you are a particularly petite woman requiring features beyond a smaller frame size, such as shorter-reach brake levers.

- If you are under 120 pounds and/or planning to race, you will benefit from a bike that is both lighter as well as smaller.

- In the smallest sizes this may lead to other issues, like toe-overlap with the front wheel.

FEMALE FRIENDLY

A female friendly bike is available in smaller frame sizes and outfitted with women's-specific components including shorter-reach brake levers, a narrower handlebar to reflect women's slender shoulders, an anatomically correct women's saddle and shorter cranks. The best female-friendly bikes will also attempt to shed weight wherever possible, and in places that count the most, such as wheels. Keep in mind that most bike components were designed for a 180-pound male, who would be far more capable of maneuvering a 27-pound bike than a 115-pound female. Whether you are a cross-country

mountain biker, a downhill or a roadie, the overall weight of your bike is very important.

WHEN IT WORKS

- If you are looking for better handling, control and comfort or looking to shed weight to improve speed.

WHEN IT DOESN'T WORK

- If you are at the higher end of the female size spectrum, either in height or weight, women's specific components may not be beneficial.

ANATOMICALLY CORRECT

This is a true women's specific bike. It includes women's specific components and takes the concept of smaller frame sizes a step further, encompassing frame geometry and construction to fit female body dimensions. Even a woman and man of the same height and similar weight will have different bodily dimensions. Women tend to have longer legs, a shorter torso and shorter femurs. The women's-specific frame geometry accounts for this with adjusted angles, a shorter top tube for a more comfortable reach and increased stand-over height, a steeper seat angle to balance shorter femur length and properly position the rider over the pedals, and a more



relaxed (slacker) head tube angle. The slacker head angle puts the front wheel farther away from the feet, lengthening the wheelbase for a more stable bike. Ideally, an anatomically correct women's bike will also feature smaller diameter frame tubes or refined carbon layup for a lighter frame to accommodate a lighter, less powerful rider.

WHEN IT WORKS

- No matter what your height or weight, a frame designed to fit female body dimensions will improve the ride experience.

WHEN IT DOESN'T WORK

- If you are a man.