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Gavin Wright

Cycling journalist and advocate

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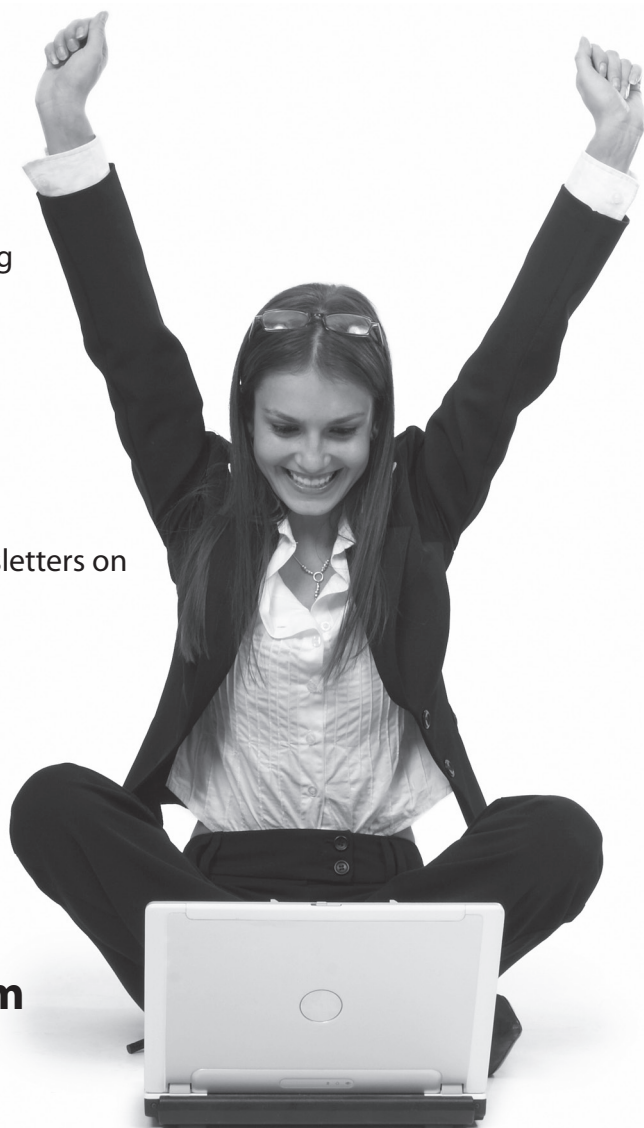
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***Australian &
New Zealand Edition***

Cycling
FOR
DUMMIES®

by Gavin Wright



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About the Author

Gavin Wright is one of Australia's leading bicycle journalists. He is well known in national cycling magazines for his features, reviews and travel articles. He has led several high-profile cycling expeditions, including a crossing of the Andes on the highest surfaced road in the world and an attempt to set the world record for cycling from sea level to high altitude. Gavin has toured unsupported on his bicycle in Indochina, Europe and the Amazon jungle. He is also a person living with type 1 diabetes and spends much time promoting exercise for other people living with the same condition.

Starting his professional career as a community worker in the troubled London boroughs in the 1980s, Gavin moved on to film school at the age of 25. He then worked as a writer and producer in community television in London before moving to Australia. Gavin worked on the Melbourne production of *Phantom of the Opera* and then changed course (again) and took up cooking. He worked as a chef and head chef in busy Melbourne CBD restaurants, but decided to take on more social hours when he started a family. Gavin took up journalism, returned to bicycling and was able to happily marry the two.

A graduate of the London Institute where he majored in Film and Photography, Gavin is also a qualified journalist from the Australian College of Journalism. He founded a bicycle users' group in Melbourne's western suburbs that is now one of the strongest in the region. He has worked for Bicycle Victoria as both a staff member and a volunteer and co-authored their 2008 book *The Bike Bible*.

Gavin Wright now lives on the Gold Coast with his wife, Julia, and his three children, Billy, Isobel and Akira. He spends many hours cycling on roads through the hills of the Gold Coast hinterland and on the hundreds of kilometres of local singletrack and fire trails.

Dedication

Firstly, this book is dedicated to my beautiful, talented and discerning wife, Julia, and to my most excellent children, Billy, Isobel and Akira, for their practical, motivational and inspirational support. I hope we ride together forever.

Secondly, to two friends and cyclists: Monique Hanley and Hugh Harvey. Monique has worked hard to achieve some extraordinary feats and excel in competition. She has taken all hurdles, such as type 1 diabetes and even serious injury, as challenges and has been an inspiration to many other cyclists living with type 1 diabetes, including myself. She's much faster than me, but always a great pleasure to cycle with. Hugh has been my cycling partner on South American adventures and around Australia. We have ridden through some tough situations and had adventures the likes of which most people will never know. He's a strong cyclist, a loyal and exemplary riding companion and a very good friend.

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Foreword

As a cyclist, it is hard to imagine how people clad in Lycra, perched on a road bike and negotiating their way through traffic could be intimidating. If anything, being exposed to the elements, wearing clothing that offers no protection and is about as close to wearing nothing at all as you're allowed in public brings with it a feeling of vulnerability seldom matched in other moments of your day. But intimidating cyclists can be.

That is what was revealed to me when I hosted a cycling forum as part of a sustainable living festival. The aim of the forum was to discuss ways of increasing participation in cycling as a part of everyday life, and one aspect of that was figuring out what's stopping people from giving two wheels a go.

The biggest deterrent, it was decided, was the perceived danger associated with cycling on city streets. Drivers are often seen as 'out to get cyclists', the consequences of even minor cycling accidents (though rare) can be disastrous, and even with a helmet there seemed to be little protection from injury.

But the second biggest deterrent was how intimidating existing cyclists seem to be and how that made non-cyclists hesitant to join in for fear of ridicule. People felt that the first time they walked into a bike shop, they were overwhelmed. Not by the array of possible bikes or accessories, but by the sheer magnitude of stuff that they don't know. Everyone else in the shop seemed to be an expert and they were afraid to ask any questions for fear of appearing like an idiot. When you add to that the prevalent image of the weekend peloton — whizzing by en masse in a blur of technicolour Lycra to win imaginary tours that exist only in their own heads — cycling quickly takes on the appearance of a specialised activity that's too hard to join.

This point was highlighted by some questions a colleague asked me the night before a fundraising bike ride in which we were participating. I had organised a few people from work to form a team for the event, which invited 'riders of all ages and all abilities to participate in a non-competitive, non-racing, scenic ride'. I had told everyone to ride at their own pace and that the point of the whole endeavour was to have fun. Nonetheless, my workmate pulled me aside and said, 'Before I turn up tomorrow, I wanted to ask you something. I have a mountain bike. Will people think I'm silly for riding on a mountain bike?' I assured him that there would be people on every sort of bike, probably even some buffoons on penny-farthings,

and that he had nothing to worry about. He then paused for a while before asking, 'And what if, hypothetically, I may have accidentally bought women's bike shorts to ride in. Will anyone notice?' After I had reassured him again that his cross-dressing would be apparent to him and him alone, it occurred to me that, for the inexperienced rider, even a social fun ride could be as intimidating as trying to pick an outfit for a school formal.

The bottom line is that the world of cycling can at first seem unwelcoming. But you shouldn't feel like cycling is an activity only for the weekend Olympian or, indeed, something that's just too hard to take up later in life. Cycling should feel like the easy option.

And that's why *Cycling For Dummies*, Australian and New Zealand Edition, is the perfect place to start. For starters, it answers all the basic questions that you might feel embarrassed to ask the experts at the local bike shop or even your gung-ho cycling colleagues. It also shows just how easy it is to make cycling a simple, functional and rewarding part of your life, as well as keeping you as safe as possible when riding. Think of this book as a non-judgemental friend who's happy to help get you in the saddle and headed off down the road to a healthier, happier two-wheeled life.

Charlie Pickering

Comedian, writer and TV host — but, above all, cyclist.

Introduction

Anual Australian surveys have shown for years that cycling is one of our most popular physical activities, along with swimming, aerobics and walking. Figures show even more people, proportionally, ride bikes in New Zealand. Bike sales in all forms of cycling have been increasing year by year in both countries, long ago leaving car sales behind.

Governments have recognised the advantages of having more people riding rather than driving, and traffic planners have learnt that after cycling infrastructure appears — such as bike lanes, bike paths and real help for bicycles through junctions — cyclists come pouring onto roads by the thousand. Campaigns and better facilities have seen some commuter cycling corridors increase their use twentyfold over the last 20 years.

More Australians and New Zealanders are riding bicycles by the day. Some of them are brand new to the world of bikes, some of them have just been away and some folk are making the decision to cycle more. Wherever you are in this picture, no doubt you feel you need to know more in some area of cycling. You're in luck then because cycling is definitely the topic of this book.

About This Book

This book, like all *For Dummies* books, is designed to be as easy as possible to use and read. Although it's got lots of pages and tonnes of information, it should be the simplest and best cycling book ever to sit on the bookshop shelf.

The information in this book is easy to find. Whether you want to come to grips with everything about one aspect of cycling by reading the whole chapter on that aspect, or target one specific point, you can locate your subject in no time and focus on precisely what you want to find out.

The information is also easy to understand. I don't assume you'll read the whole book and I don't use any jargon, just plain Australian (and New Zealand) English. There are names to learn as you find out about different parts of your bike, or even various parts of your body, but no overly technical talk to build a barrier between you and what you need to know.

You can often use alternative methods to achieve the same result. In this book, however, I don't show you lots of ways of doing things — I just show you the easiest or most effective. After all, you only really have to have one technique up your sleeve to be able to get the job done.

I've written this book to try to answer most of your questions — anything from 'Okay, which is the front end?' to 'How can I shift my lactate threshold?'. If you want to ride a bike — or ride a bike more — this book is both a comprehensive reference, with everything you need to know, and an engaging read you'll enjoy and keep for years.

This book gives you the power, in small simple stages, to take control of all aspects of your cycling. You can make the decisions but then this book helps you carry them through. Whatever you want to get out of your bicycle, this book shows you the way.

Conventions Used in This Book

Important bits of information are presented in special ways to make sure you notice them right away.

- ✔ **Bulleted lists:** Bulleted lists (just like this one) indicate things you can do in any order or group related bits of information, such as what spare parts to take when you cycle over mountains.
- ✔ **Currency:** Whenever I mention a cost, such as the price of a tyre, this will be a rough guide and will be in Australian dollars.
- ✔ **New terms:** New words or terms are written in italics and either closely preceded or followed by a simple definition.
- ✔ **Numbered lists:** When you see a numbered list, follow the steps in number order to get a job, such as fixing a puncture, done.
- ✔ **Sidebars:** Text enclosed in a shaded grey box is always information that's interesting to read, but not necessarily essential for you to know to understand the topic.
- ✔ **Web addresses:** When I write about a website of interest I include the web address in a special typeface like this: `www.gavinsbike.com.au`.

Web addresses do change from time to time, so if the website's not there — sorry — try doing an internet search. Also, when this book was printed, some web addresses may have been broken across two lines of text. If that happened, rest assured that we haven't put in any extra characters (such as hyphens) to indicate the break and there won't be any spaces. So, when using one of these Web addresses, just type in exactly what you see in this book, pretending the line break doesn't exist.

Foolish Assumptions

To write this book I had to make assumptions about you that may not be true. Because this book is aimed primarily at beginners, but also at people who want to learn more, I have assumed all the way through that you don't know anything about the topic at hand.

I do understand that some people picking up this book will already know quite a bit about bikes. Those readers might find some of my explanations overly simple and some of the instructions I've included painfully obvious.

If you find yourself reading through one of those spots, just tell yourself, 'Too easy!' and skip to a section that covers an area you need to know more about.

How This Book Is Organised

This book is divided into five parts.

Part I: Getting Ready to Swing Your Leg Over the Saddle

This part prepares you for cycling, with lots of information about all sorts of different bikes, other things you can buy to go with bikes, how to make sure your bike is set up right and ideas about riding and feeling good about riding. These are things that will help you get the best bike to suit your needs and get the most out of cycling, with all sorts of suggestions about shopping and how to look for the best way to go now you're on a bicycle.

Part II: Freewheeling Fundamentals

From the very basic first lessons in sitting on a saddle and pedalling off to dealing with difficult junctions, this part gives you the lowdown on riding and roads. Along the way, I cover safety and the rules for cycling in Australia and New Zealand. Find out where it's safe to leave your bike, what the dangers are to cyclists, and how best to tackle them.

Part III: Rolling Beyond the Basics

In this part I go a little further into cycling. I provide ideas and strategies for getting better at your cycling, whether it's on- or off-road, and cover the physiological side as well as all other aspects of training. There's a chapter on touring and what you need to take, and a chapter on everything about children and bikes.

Part IV: Maintaining Your Bike and Yourself

In this part, you can read about the aches and pains you might get and how to fix them, as well as what you should be eating (your essential fuel) to give yourself the right energy for cycling. You can then move on to fixing your bike, starting with the very basic jobs of fixing a flat and oiling your chain, then tackling a few more-complicated maintenance tasks to put yourself more in control.

Part V: The Part of Tens

This part gives you four cycling super-lists: A list of cycling do's and don'ts, ten of the best rides around Australia and New Zealand, ten of the most awesome races and tours around the world, and ten great things about cycling.

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout *Cycling For Dummies*, Australian & New Zealand Edition, you encounter little icons in the left margin of the pages, which alert you to specific types of information in the text. Here's what the icons mean:



These are little stories from my cycling experiences around the world and meetings with other cyclists. They all contain some little piece of wisdom and hopefully humour too, and are used to illustrate the subject I'm explaining.



When you see this icon, you know a little piece of wisdom is coming your way. Not something to worry you, just a point to bear in mind. Your cycling will go smoother if you don't forget these points.



Here and there in this book I've felt it important to explain exactly how things work, what they're made of or how they're put together. For some people this will satisfy a need to understand why they have to do what needs to be done. Other people will not want to be bothered with that. If you see this icon, it's all good stuff, but it's not essential for you to read that paragraph.



Tips are little bits of know-how I've picked up as I've cycled or that I've picked up from other cyclists over the years. They're little tricks for making your cycling, training or repairing easier, and ways of doing things better or quicker. You'll pick up tips from other cyclists too — this is just a way of speeding things up for you.



Danger ahead: Don't do it, don't go there. This icon alerts you to possible dire consequences if you don't heed the advice being given. I don't want you to suffer as a cyclist, so pay close attention when you see this sign.

Where to Go from Here

Reading this book should be like riding your bike: It's the Freedom Machine and you can go where you like. Stop and take in the view here, sit in the shade for a snack there. You can steer your way through these pages, avoiding parts that are irrelevant to your needs like potholes on a wet bend, but it will always be an easy downhill dash to the bit you need to read.

If you're a cycling newbie, the first points about getting on your bike should be a big help and should get you launched on a tour of discovery, good health and long-lasting pleasure. Pages on interval training can be left until a time when you feel you need to know — they'll keep.

If all the simple stuff is old hat (or maybe helmet) to you, the more involved sections of this book should get you fired up and pedalling fast towards achieving your goals and fulfilling your dreams.

And hopefully I'll see you out there on your bike sometime!

Part I

Getting Ready to Swing Your Leg Over the Saddle



'We'll take you back to the shop, explain you're new to cycling and that you meant "Tour de France" when you said "Cirque du Soleil".'

In this part . . .

This part provides everything you need to know to get out there and start enjoying life as a cyclist. I run through the different approaches you can take with your cycling, and also cover the long-term benefits of getting on a bike.

You can't cycle anywhere without a bike, so this part covers that basic aspect, taking you through the different kinds of bikes available, and how to pick one that suits all of your needs. Once you've picked out a bike, the choices don't end there. This part also takes you through the different accessories available — some of which are required by law, and some more a personal style requirement. I also cover adjusting your bike to suit your body and comfort levels, and provide some tips on incorporating cycling into your lifestyle.

Chapter 1

Getting Into Cycling

In This Chapter

- ▶ Starting off your new relationship with your bike
 - ▶ Settling in and getting to know each other
 - ▶ Rolling off into the sunset of long-term happy cycling
-

Deciding to ride a bicycle, or to ride a bike more, is a move you won't regret. You may have worked out that it's better for the environment, better for traffic congestion and your community and, perhaps most of all, better for your health. When you start riding, you'll kick yourself that you didn't do it earlier.

Riding a bike is fun — it starts that way and it doesn't stop. Every time I rest my feet on my pedals and speed off down my steep driveway, I get a feeling of great pleasure, just as I did when I was a boy and first took off on a bike with a spirit of freedom and adventure.

But it's not as simple as just going to the shop, buying a bike and riding off down the street. You don't need to know a great deal initially — you can go on learning about bikes forever — but you need to start with an awareness of the basics.

Get the wrong bike and your relationship could become rocky and eventually fall apart. Get the right one and it'll be a marriage made on the perfect bike path. And from there, the richness of your developing affair with your bike will have you dreaming of all the possible things the two of you could do.

This chapter covers the basics to get you started (or back) on the bike and on the right path to a long life together.

Meeting Your Bike

When looking for your bike, play it cool and get it right. A key point in searching for any new relationship is to be self-aware, and that's true for cycling as well. Know your own needs and be positive about them. Focus on the many positive aspects a bicycle can provide, rather than what it can't give you.

Stay in control and don't let your feelings be dominated by any past experiences. If you're coming back to cycling after a break of many years, keep in mind that bikes are different these days. Your perfect bike is out there waiting for you — one that will be kind to you and that you will love.

Riding for the first time

If cycling is a whole new world for you, then welcome. I guarantee you're going to enjoy it, but I also know there are a couple of big steps you have to take before you're waking up in the morning with that big I'm-a-cyclist smile on your face.

The biggest decision you have to make is what kind of bicycle to buy. You might have studied those racy-looking figures in Lycra and decided that's the gear for you, but you need to think about the type of cycling you're going to be doing. Ask yourself what you want the bike for. If you're going to train, race and win, you're absolutely right — you need a road bike. But most people's requirements are a little less intense and bike makers spend a great deal of time crafting machines to suit the most specific of needs. If you want the bike to use when you go shopping, to ride on bike paths or to cycle into the hills on unsurfaced roads, someone has designed and built a bike with precisely you in mind.

If you want to speed up and down rocky paths in the bush, a mountain bike is what you need. If you've decided to commute, a road bike might be best, but you could be more comfortable on a flat-bar road bike or a fitness bike. If you're thinking about riding instead of driving when you want to visit friends or pop to the supermarket (good for you), a comfort bike or a great-looking retro bike might be the best idea.

Have a look at Chapter 2 for plenty of information on different kinds of bikes. Then have a chat with the people down at the bike shop — tell them what your plans are and get some advice. They're not expecting you to buy straightaway, so don't feel you'll be under pressure.