



THE EXPERT



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Get your fix

Is there any reason to ride a fixed-wheel bicycle, short of fashion? Sports scientist **Joe Beer** looks at the pros and cons for your body

Fixed-wheel bicycles look elegantly simple, and their riders fluid and purposeful. In the past, fixed wheel was de rigueur off-season training for the club rider. Nowadays you don't see many fixed-wheel bikes outside of cities like London. Fixed is no longer common in time trialling, it's banned in triathlon, and rare on club rides.

There's more to fixies than fashion, however. Compared to riding with derailleur gears, it has distinct benefits – and potential problems.

Fixed assets

Obviously, with no freewheeling you have to pedal when you are moving. That means the nervous system gets a more continuous stimulation than the start-stop of freewheel cycling. On a bike with a freewheel, you'll be at zero cadence for about 10-30% of the ride. On a fixed you make the nervous system and muscles work continuously. You get more of a workout.

Second, it focuses the mind profoundly, much like another old-school and effective training tool: rollers. Riding rollers forces you to concentrate far more than

an indoor turbo trainer. Riding fixed on rollers is great for balance and coordination. You'll never get so much, mentally and physically, out of a 20-minute ride. Out on the road, too, you have to remain alert when riding fixed. If you lose focus and stop pedalling, then at best you'll get jerked up off the saddle and at worst you'll go over the bars. You can only stop pedalling by backing off slowly and feathering the brake or brakes – legally, a front one is sufficient by itself.

Third, fixed forces you out of your comfort zone when it comes to cadence. On inclines you have to push – it's forceful, low-cadence strength work. On descents and with tail winds you get the cadence up and spin quickly, with no let up.

Fixed costs

It's not all good news. Riding fixed is best in flat or rolling terrain. Too much excessively hilly riding will put high loads on the knees and straining on the pedals can put similar strain on your lower back. Those with previous injury history need to tread carefully.

The need to keep pedalling makes it a potential accident risk for poorly skilled riders. Start riding fixed on quiet roads or away from them entirely. Don't just jump on and head into the traffic.

That said, even if you never buy a fixed-wheel bike it's well worth trying this elegant form of cycling. It's not like riding a singlespeed with a freewheel. The riders of yesteryear knew it helped them become smooth pedallers, and now as then a fixie is a simple bike to put together and maintain.

Fix it for me

1. **Helps develop a smooth pedalling style (like Bradley Wiggins!).**
2. A simple bike for errands and commuting – conditions allowing.
3. **Reliable and easy to maintain.**
4. A great way to focus your mind on pedalling.
5. **A chance to justify another bike.**