

Knowhow

Making sense of commonly misunderstood cycling subjects



DAN JOYCE
Cycle Editor

Technical

Shopping for children's bikes – where do I start?

Buy from a good bike shop! The kids' bikes you see in catalogue shops are heavier and use poorer-quality parts. While children will be thrilled by any new bike, enthusiasm will fade if it's not fun to ride.

A well-built, lightweight bike will still be in use several Christmases later. It can be handed down to a brother or sister, sold secondhand, or in some cases (notably Islabikes and Frog) part-exchanged. Over its lifetime, a quality bike will actually cost less per year.

Size and weight

- Don't buy a bike for your child to grow into. For safety's sake, it has to fit. They must be able to get a foot down easily when sitting on the saddle – both feet for learners – and have clearance when standing over the top tube.
- Children's bikes are sized primarily by wheel diameter. Common sizes are 12in, 14in, 16in, 20in, 24in, 26in, and roughly 27in (700C road or wider-tyred 650B). As a rule of thumb, which it's possible to break with careful frame design, your child's inside leg length should equal or exceed the nominal wheel diameter. To measure inside leg, first measure standing



height, back to a wall, then subtract sitting height (back and backside to the wall).

- Frame dimensions vary between brands, so be guided by how your child looks sitting on and standing over the bike, not just wheel size. Children are seldom comfortable leaning forward much; look for a relatively upright, relaxed sitting position on the bike.
- Weight is a huge deal, yet some children's bikes will be heavier than yours! A 23kg child on a 11.5kg bike is like a 70kg adult on a 35kg bike. Look for aluminium tubing or narrow diameter steel tubes.

Components

- Components need scaling down too. Some aren't, especially cranks. Another rule of thumb: crank length should only be about 10% of height. Overlong cranks make pedalling awkward and require the bottom bracket to be higher, so it's harder to put feet down.
- Brake levers must be in reach and easy to apply. Try with only your little finger or ring finger. Good-quality V-brakes with smaller, reach-adjustable levers are usually sufficient.
- Be sceptical about suspension. Cheap, lookalike suspension adds weight and detracts from performance. Either buy a fully rigid bike or, for the committed mountain biker, a hardtail MTB with a plush, air-sprung fork that can be tuned for a low weight.
- With gears too, less is often more. Avoid front derailleurs, which add weight and complexity. Singlespeed is ideal for starter bikes, then 1x gearing thereafter. ●

Best brands

The benchmark children's bike manufacturer – for everything from balance bikes for tots, to all-rounders for younger teens – is Islabikes (islabikes.co.uk). The somewhat premium price is fully justified. We've reviewed scores of children's bikes and Islabikes have always been better designed and specified.

Frog Bikes (frogbikes.co.uk) are also very good, and are stocked in stores around the country.

German manufacturer Puky (puky.de/en), pronounced 'pooky', leads the way when it comes to fully equipped utility bikes.

Of the mainstream brands, Pinnacle, Bobbin, Ridgeback, Whyte, and Cube all have nice models. But don't discount your local shop's brands, either.

Size matters

Bike sizing varies between brands, but use these figures as a start

Age	Height (from)	Inside leg (from)	Wheels (max)	Cranks*	Gears
2+	90cm	30cm/12in	12in	none (balance bike)	
3+	95cm	36cm/14in	14in	~100mm	1
4+	105cm	41cm/16in	16in	~105mm	1
5+	115cm	51cm/20in	20in	~115mm	1-8
7+	130cm	61cm/24in	24in	~130mm	6-8
9+	140cm	66cm/26in	26in	~140mm	6-10
11+	150cm	69cm/27in	27in	~150mm	6-10

* +/- 10mm

Starter bikes

Two top kids' bikes are put to the test: cyclinguk.org/article/bike-test-islabikes-cnoc-16-vs-frog-48