

Reviews

Books

A ROUND-UP OF THE LATEST CYCLING-RELATED READS

Introduction

This is remarkable.

My experience of cycling has been captured within the pages of a book written by a man born a generation before me, in another country, whom I have never met. As I said, remarkable.

It's hard to believe that he knows me. With a poet's precision and compassion, he has got to the heart of the same compulsion I have shared to jump on a bike, and just go cycling off; a need that has become increasingly different throughout my life as I have grown older with a philosopher's reasoning, his unpicked and articulated my unspoken thoughts. Now he's telling me what I was thinking all along.

Paul Fournel's evocative writing impresses itself upon the reader just as poetically, just as memorably, as the bicycle captures the soul of its rider. Anyone for whom the act of pedalling continues to fascinate and infuriate will find his eloquent words an inspiring ride long after the book has been closed, letters to letter, pages to pages, for kilometers.

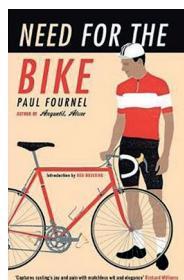
Through these pages, which flow like the mysteriously forming and reforming thoughts of a ride in the Loire Valley, Fournel reveals the joy and strength brought by a lifetime of dedication to the pursuit of an obsession. Tales long past, from that miraculous moment, when, at the age of five, he

'no longer heard the noise of running below' nor the sound of 'wheel on wheel' on the track, through to the early days of cycling began. It is a continuation unbroken well into the twenty-first century. A spell of work in Cairo (where he was posted as the French cultural attaché until 2003) left him temporarily unable to cycle, and almost asphyxiated as a result. But he soon returned to riding.

Born in 1947 into the furnace of French cycling, Saint-Féme, just before the golden age of the national sport burst onto the scene, its magical aura, Fournel grew up steeped in the culture of cycling, and has written about it for over 40 years for. Such readers will wistfully inhale from these pages. His is a world of handmade steel, neither too rigid, nor too flexible, leather saddles imported from England, and the like. He also remembers the Criterium general, what a time to be alive! This is first-hand testimony, forged from the steel that made his home city of Saint-Féme famous throughout the cycling world: elegant, durable, something to be proud of.

He remembers, at the age of ten, embarking on a long ride over the famous cols that surround Saint-Féme and have since so often featured in the Tour de France. That day his father, at the head of the pack, of course, was not far behind. They stopped for a break, and Fournel's dad turned and waved his young son forward. So, alone, the Paul angled his handlebars towards a future that had already been formed in his love of riding, but lonely, in a difficult, perhaps even dangerous, place, but one which cements a bond. Fournel also recalls sitting in the velodrome, watching the greats of French racing rippling around the track, and feeling like he wanted to be most ill-fated cycling en l'air! Riveting. Some education, that.

Need for the Bike



Details

By: Paul Fournel

Publisher: Pursuit Books

Price: £9.99

ISBN: 978-1788162692

THIS BOOK AIMS to encapsulate our delightful passion – and does just that, covering everything from the author's first memories of riding a bike to being inspired by the professional peloton. It's a personal account of Fournel's life of cycling, with tales including: a love-hate relationship with Ventoux; his first 100km ride, aged ten, when he became a 'real' cyclist; and several vivid descriptions of when it all goes wrong, whether being hit by a car door or descending too fast to retain control.

Almost all the short tales will be identifiable to any cycling enthusiast. Of particular note is the passage on the joy of riding with friends, where his evocative description of being part of a group rings true.

It's well written and easy to read; the author's background as a poet comes out in his prose. It's been well translated from the original French, so much so you would be hard-pressed to pick out any misinterpretation.

While chapters on *rouleurs* and *baroudeurs* touch on a personal love of professional cycling, the elements of bike-nerdiness within the writing are well balanced with storytelling in such a way that anyone can enjoy this book.

Nik Hart



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cyclinguk.org/article/give-your-cyclist-book-christmas

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Fantastic Female Adventurers



Details

By: Lily Dyu

Publisher: Vertebrate Publishing

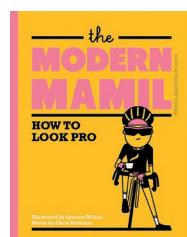
Price: £12.99

ISBN: 978-1912560172

MEET 14 AWE-INSPIRING women who have undertaken challenges over land, sea and space – several of which include cycling. Compiled by a journalist, the style is accessible. My 7-year-old liked how each story began with the women's childhoods and their different paths to adventure. A gift with lots of 'wow!' factor for younger readers, similar to the 'Goodnight Stories for Rebel Girls' and 'Fantastically Great Women' series, but equally enjoyable for all ages.

Georgina Cox

The Modern MAMIL: How to Look Pro



Details

By: Chris McGuire [author], Spencer Wilson [illustrator]

Publisher: Ice House Books

Price: £9.99

ISBN: 978-1912867097

THIS AMUSING BOOK from Chris McGuire pokes fun at MAMILs (middle-aged men in lycra), providing all the tips required to look as pro as possible both on and off the bike. From shaving your legs to slamming your stem for the most aero look, this book will have you smiling wryly at every page. Most cyclists know someone who is a MAMIL, if they're not one personally. With fitting illustrations from Spencer Wilson to match, this book would make a good stocking filler for any cycling enthusiast.

Pip Munday



Details

By: Laura Bingham [author], Laura Wall [illustrator]

Publisher: Award Publications

Price: £6.99

ISBN: 978-1782703433

Mountains of Dreams

THE 32-PAGE picture book tells the story of 22-year-old British adventurer Laura Bingham, who set herself the challenge of cycling 7,000km from Ecuador to Argentina with no money. The book has brightly coloured illustrations and lovely touches like animals to spot on each page. My 6-year-old daughter loved this book, although I had to keep reassuring her that Laura made it home safe in the end. It's a fantastic real-life story to inspire little girls (and boys).

Victoria Hazaël