

# A fine vintage

The Bradley Wiggins Effect hasn't just been confined to young racers keen to emulate their hero — older riders are also discovering the best pastime on earth

Words Jamie Ewbank Photos Chris Catchpole



**T**he Wiggo Effect has seen flocks of new riders on the roads. It's given Halfords' cycling department a 14.7 per cent sales bump and seen track and club rides get booked up for months in advance, but it's not all youthful Olympic hopefuls sporting newly sprouted sideburns.

The cycling boom crosses all age ranges, and most cyclists have got a father, uncle, cousin or mother-in-law (or in my case, all four) who've recently taken to cycling in one form or another, be it gently putting the miles in for the sake of fitness and nice scenery, through to ambitions towards sportive riding or veterans' racing.

Whether you prefer the term mature, veteran, senior or even — if you're happy to let marketing speak ruin the English language ▶▶

HEALTH MATTERS

## As a doctor I'm often asked...

CA spoke with Dr Baldeep Baines, a GP and medical lecturer for the Royal Navy, to see if there is anything an older rider should consider before taking up cycling.

### Are there any particular benefits for older riders taking up cycling?

Exercise, of any kind, is good. It reduces cardiovascular disease risk and boosts the immune system. You have to be careful not to make it too strenuous as that can depress the immune system, but getting mildly breathless is good even for the elderly. Cycling is particularly good, as it's a low-impact activity that encourages the secretion of synovial fluid, which lubricates the joints without damaging the surface. People with rheumatism and mild arthritis would most definitely benefit from cycling.

### Why is low impact exercise so important as we age?

Conditions like arthritis are inevitable as you grow older, and any injuries or strains to your joints accelerate the arthritis process. That actually applies to people of all ages, but bones and ligaments in older people are more fragile and more prone to injuries, so a low impact form of exercise is easier on the joints.

### Should older riders consider using medicines or dietary supplements before exercising?

Glucosamine is the supplement that has been knocking about for some time, and is supposed to increase the lubrication of the joints. Scientifically though, that's inconclusive. My suggestion is that a normal, healthy diet is sufficient, and that calcium supplements can be useful for elderly people with osteoporosis.

### Are there any warning signs that older riders need to be aware of?

Nothing that younger riders wouldn't also need to watch out for, unless you have cardiac disease.

If you ever experience chest pain, it's time to stop. Remember, it will take longer for an older rider to build strength and stamina, and injuries will take longer to recover from. You've just got to remember you're not in your 20s any more.

### Beyond joints and muscles, is there anything else that the more mature cyclist should keep an eye on?

Clip-in pedals [that's clipless in the unintuitive language of cyclists] work the hamstrings more than a normal pedal. Crossing over from, say, jogging to cycling should not cause much of an issue but it can be harder to get cycling fit from running and vice versa, and cycling and running are both easy on the tendons as long as you're not sprinting: a normal pace is good.

### Do older riders need to see a doctor before taking up cycling?

I'd say it's probably not essential, but in an ideal world, if time permits, there's probably no harm in having a chat with your GP if you intend to take up new sports. I'm being overcautious, but the GPs will have your medical records with them and should be able to advise you appropriately, but as I say, exercise of any kind is good.



David Rogers: "Some days I feel I could cycle forever"



— 'silver cyclist', there are almost as many older riders taking to the tarmac as there are young cyclists. While we've never yet encountered a cycling club that wasn't welcoming, it's fair to say that an 80-mile dash with a competitive club isn't the best place for a new rider to start.

#### Fit for life

Founded in 1951, the Forty Plus Cycling Club ([www.fortypluscc.co.uk](http://www.fortypluscc.co.uk)) caters, as its name would suggest, for riders of a more elegant vintage. It's a national club, albeit at its most active in the south of England, and it caters for riders from a variety of backgrounds, including Jan Maitland, a 64-year-old comparative newbie who returned to cycling just over a year ago and has already ridden a coast-to-coast, through to Anne

Jarman, a 75-year-old rider who has been cycling for 59 years, rode end-to-end in 2005 and has "never lost the passion for cycling". A third member of the club is 66-year-old David Rogers, who took up cycling for health reasons.

"My interest in cycling ignited when I was told by my older son, 'If you give up smoking I'll give you a good bike to ride. If you take up smoking again I'll take the bike back.'

### "Riding with like-minded cyclists provides all the encouragement and motivation you need"

I struck the deal and I gradually cleared my lungs. The bike never went back. I've not smoked for nearly 15 years," David explains.

While Jan maintains that cycling feels the same now as it did in her 20s, for Anne it's a little harder than it used to be: "It's a little slower as you would expect, but cycling is still as enjoyable as it ever was. And with clubs like the Forty Plus you are encouraged by joining like-minded people. The club members are very approachable, helpful and friendly and will actively encourage new members."

As any rider of any age can tell you, when the going gets tough, the tough buy something sparkly, and Anne has upgraded some of her kit to make riding easier.

"I have purchased a lightweight carbon-fibre bicycle, which is fantastic

to ride at any age. Saddles and pedals are very personal to the rider and you find out what is best for you, but by joining a club like the Forty Plus CC you can discuss what is suitable for you with fellow experienced cyclists."

Dave has also made some tweaks to his ride, and although they weren't motivated by his age, they have made a difference to his comfort. "I had a bike fitting at C&N cycles in Redhill after I bought my Cannondale CAAD8. This led to having a longer stem and adjustments to saddle height. I've also had thicker bar tape fitted to the drop bars, which reduces impact to help the aches in my hands."

#### Friends with benefits

All three cite riding with like-minded cyclists as the main benefit of joining a veterans' club, and Jan and David are particularly positive about finding new challenges.

"My friend Ben encouraged me to take part in the introduction to fixed-wheel riding session at the velodrome at Herne Hill this month," says David. "I managed to ride with the medium-to-slow group on the second session so I'm feeling pretty good about that."

"I was pretty proud of myself this year when I took part in the local hill-climb, called the Waller Pain. It really was painful! My goal was to get to the top of the hill without falling over. I managed it in three minutes,

40 seconds in the Fat Dads and Fit Mums category."

Jan's rides don't sound like they've been quite as agonising, but she agrees with David about the need to have new goals. "Joining the Forty Plus club was enjoyable from day one. It gave me the reason to ride again and since then I have cycled the coast-to-coast route from St Bees in Cumbria to Tyneside. It took three cycling days.

"Keeping up with the stronger, fitter men who are much older than me is definitely an issue. I have always been reasonably sporty and thought I would catch up with the others fitness-wise pretty quickly. It has taken me 15 months to get to the position where I am happy to cycle our weekly club ride, and I still feel that I want and need to improve."

All older riders find that it takes longer to build or rebuild fitness, something our GP assures us is completely normal (see box on p95), but the benefits are huge, as David attests:

"As I get older I realise I don't have that ability to sprint as my muscles have lost strength, but overall I think I'm a fitter cyclist than when I was in my 40s and 50s. I hadn't taken notice then of the impact of smoking, working style, drinking a little too much and eating too many biscuits. Getting older does seem to lead to good stamina for longer rides. Some days I feel I could cycle forever." **End**



Jan Maitland: 64 and ready for cycling challenges

#### RIDE IN COMFORT

### Senior cycling from head to toe

#### Eyes

Sadly, ordinary spectacles don't do anything to reduce the glare of a sunny day or, more importantly, keep the wind out of your eyes. The easiest solution is to get a pair of 'fitover shades' that can be safely worn over your glasses and will give you a wraparound windshield like proper cycling shades. Most major manufacturers also offer a prescription or RX lens service, or at the very least an RX adaptor that allows prescription lenses to be used with your shades.

#### Back and shoulders

Lifelong cyclists have often built such durability that they can continue riding a fully zipped, high-saddle, low-bars racing frame with a seat tube that throws them head first towards the stem. For the rest of us, however, a slightly more relaxed geometry can massively reduce aches and pains in the lower back and shoulders. A frame with a high head tube, gentle reach from saddle to bars and a comparatively slack seat tube angle like you'd find on a tourer will be much more comfortable.

#### Hips

There's a good reason why what used to be casually called 'women's bikes' are now called 'step-throughs'. Hips that are perfectly capable of turning pedals for jaw-dropping durations can still balk at being swung over a high top tube. By removing gender bias from the name, step-throughs have made themselves more palatable to male riders who can put in the miles, but not necessarily the high kicks.

#### Knees

Cleat float is vital for easing the strain on your knees. For every rider who copes perfectly on 0° float, you'll find half a dozen who've found that a little give has eased the repetitive grind on their knees. Switching from black cleats up through grey, red or yellow, or even swapping to a free-float system, should eliminate most knee pain. It's best to move in increments, as some riders have found that too much float can simply shift the problem from the front to the back of the knee.