

PROMOTION/ **TRAINING** and **PROGRAMMES**

BIKE TESTING EVENTS

Overview

People whose last experience on a bike was as a child on a single-speed bike or people with physical limitations that don't allow them to ride a standard bike might be surprised at the range of bikes today that are comfortable and enjoyable to ride. While information on bikes can be gained through other means, the hands-on experience of a bike testing event is much more likely to help people find the most appropriate bike for them and thus to create a lasting enthusiasm for cycling.

Background and Objectives

Definition

A bike testing event is generally a one-day event at which people can test ride a variety of bicycles. Bike manufacturers are invited to bring a range of different bikes, and a short test track is set up so people can try different types of bikes. Depending on the city (starter, climber, or champion), the focus may be on potential cyclists in general, or on the needs of a specific target group, such as senior citizens, those with physical disabilities, or families with small children.

Function/Objective

A fundamental barrier to cycling is the lack of a bike that is mechanically sound, comfortable, and pleasant to ride. While people can learn about the range of bikes available today through the Internet or other forms of advertising, the hands-on experience of actually trying out the bikes for themselves is much more likely to build people's enthusiasm and excitement for cycling.

Bike testing events offer the opportunity for people to learn about, and test ride, a wide range of bikes that they may not otherwise have been aware of. As a relatively new development, pedelecs in particular are something that people are much less likely to buy without having first tried one out.

Bike testing events also offer participants the benefit of the opportunity to compare across a broader selection than you would likely find at an individual retailer.

Scope/Field of application

Bike testing events are appropriate for starter, climber, and champion cities.

Target group

In starter cities, the target group is potential cyclists. These might, for example, be adults who last cycled as children on a single-gear bike with an uncomfortable seat and aren't aware of the developments in bicycle technology.

Climber cities – where cycling is relatively normal but not yet fully integrated into the culture of the city – are a good place to focus on broadening the use of bicycles. For example:

- introducing cargo bikes to businesses that do regular deliveries
- focussing on families with young children and the possibilities of transporting them by bike (with child bike seats, "tag-along" bikes, bike trailers, etc.)

In champion cities where cycling is already a part of the mainstream culture, the focus could be on specific target groups, such as those with physical limitations that prevent them from joining the mainstream on traditional bikes. This could include:

- recumbent bikes (bikes designed so that the rider is in a sitting position and pedals horizontally rather than vertically) for those with back problems



Give Cycling a Push

Implementation Fact Sheet

- tricycles or recumbent tricycles for those with balance problems
- hand-pedalled bikes for paraplegics or others with problems with leg strength or mobility
- pedelecs for those who lack physical strength

In hilly cities – whether starter, climber, or champion – a focus on pedelecs, or even bikes with a good range of gears, could be a means of overcoming the fundamental barrier of topography.

Implementation

Partnerships

- Bike manufacturers or local bike retailers
- Manufacturers of other bike-related products, such as trailers, child bike seats
- Relevant organisations or associations in the target group community
- Local cycling organisations
- Local media

Planning considerations

Venue

- If the target audience is potential cyclists in general, a visible, central location helps to attract passers-by.
- If the focus of the event is the testing of pedelecs, an area with a fairly significant hill is a must so that participants can feel the difference that the electric support makes. Alternately, a ramp could be installed for the purpose or, while not the most attractive surroundings, multi-storey car parks are a possible venue for such an event.
- A relatively large, fully enclosed space with a single monitored access point to the test track allows you to keep track of the bikes and ensure that all participants get the training or information they need to safely test the bikes.
- The test track should be a single-direction loop rather than long and straight. This both avoids possible collisions and ensures that the bikes come back to the starting point for the next users.
- The riding surface mustn't be slippery.

Who and what needs to be there

- The bikes. You should have a range of bikes – in a range of sizes – available so that people can see and test all of the main options available to them.
- Brochures and information on safe cycling, cycling maps of the local area, information on local cycling events or activities (Bike to Work promotional events, social rides, International Car-Free Day, cycling courses, etc.)
- Experts on all of the various bikes to explain any special features
- Relevant health experts (if the target group has particular physical limitations)
- Mechanics (or others) who can adjust the bikes quickly and accurately as needed (raising saddles, adjusting handlebars, etc.) so that participants have the best experience possible on the bike
- Local cycling organisations
- Representatives of the local administration (to talk about the community's cycling initiatives)



Promoting the event

- Inviting a local celebrity (e.g. a member of a local sports team, a politician) to come for a demonstration race is a good way to draw media attention and raise awareness of the event.
- Try to connect the testing event to a festival or other activity that draws a large crowd. A car-free day where streets are closed to motor vehicle traffic could offer the opportunity to focus on cycling for transportation.
- If you're targeting a certain group (e.g. senior citizens), promote in collaboration with their organisations or associations.
- Make use of the local media and other means of public distribution of information. Having a local celebrity attend (or another attractive media "hook") will help get their attention.

Considerations

Strengths

- Hands-on experience is the best form of promotion.
- It brings various members of the cycling community together in one place as a resource for potential cyclists.
- It can address the specific needs of the target group.
- It's fun.

Weaknesses

- It can be quite a bit of work to organise and is fairly labour-intensive.
- It can be an expensive activity, depending on the sponsorship and/or other support you are able to generate.
- Assuming your venue is outdoors, your success may depend on the weather.

Evaluation of impact

If you collect contact information from participants, you can conduct an on-line survey a few months after the event to find out if they purchased a bike and/or if they were encouraged to use their own bikes (if they have one) more since the event.

Information may also be available through the participating manufacturers about how many sales resulted from the event.

Success factors and barriers

- Particularly in starter cities, it's wise to make the event free. Although charging participants could help recover some of the costs, in places where cycling is not yet highly valued, the cost barrier could be enough to prevent people from participating.
- Create a professional but friendly and welcoming atmosphere to encourage those who may be nervous.
- Make sure you should have a range of bikes in a range of sizes as well as staff or volunteers with the expertise to make appropriate minor adjustments (seat height, handlebars, etc.). If people test bikes that are the wrong size or fit them badly, they may leave thinking that bikes are awkward or uncomfortable. Ideally, participants should leave with the feeling that cycling is comfortable and fun and something they can imagine doing more of.

Good Practice Cases

Case 1

Pedelec testing on Car-Free Day – Bremen (DE)

On Car-Free Day in 2009, the Bremen chapter of the German federal bicycle association organised a bike testing event specifically for pedelecs in a local multi-storey car park. The chosen venue offered cyclists the opportunity to experience riding a bike on an uphill grade with and without electric support.

Five local retailers brought approximately 25 pedelecs for visitors to test. The retailers participated in the event as exhibitors and to look after the bikes. While the organisers weren't able to gather exact numbers (and bikes weren't allowed to be sold at the event), the event was extremely well attended and there was a great deal of interest in the pedelecs.



For more information (in German), go to adfc-bremen.de/cms/front_content.php?idcat=183&idart=867 or contact Klaus-Peter Land at klaus-peter.land@adfc-bremen.de.

Bremen is a champion city with a cycling modal split of 25%.

Pictures: by Hannah Grundey

Case 2

Pedelec Showroom – Stuttgart (DE)

In 2007, the mayor of the city of Stuttgart announced a concrete aim of 20 percent of all traffic to become bicycle traffic. But given Stuttgart's hilly topography (elevation changes of up to 300 m), they decided that pedelecs were the way to go and so the city of Stuttgart decided to convert from a car city to a pedelec city. While various initiatives have been undertaken, one of them is a pedelec showroom set up at a central location in Stuttgart to make people aware of pedelecs and the mobility options they offer. This was done in collaboration with ExtraEnergy, whose activities are focused on independent information, promotion and testing for light electric vehicles worldwide,

(www.extraenergy.org/main.php?language=en&category=extraenergy&subcateg=22&id=176).

More information on the pedelec showroom is available here:

www.datei.de/public/extraenergy/Showroom-Stuttgart-eng.pdf

Stuttgart is a climber city with a cycling modal split of 7%.