

Evaluating Quality of Bicycles

Purchasing a new bicycle can be a lot of fun. It also can be a confusing experience for a novice who walks into a bike shop and gazes at a group of bikes that look the same but vary widely in price. “You get what you pay for” rings in the potential purchaser’s ears but how does one know that a \$1,500 bike is worth three times a \$500 one? After all, when I get a headache, a generic aspirin gets the job done for less than a brand-name aspirin.

The best solution is to take a knowledgeable friend along or visit a bike shop in your area that has developed a reputation built on service. That means, long before making a sale, the shop’s staff will ask you what you’re planning to use the bike for, what your price range is and then they take the time to explain the differences in similar models.



Weight and durability are two of the main differences between lower and higher-priced bicycles. A steel frame, for instance, would cost less than a light-weight carbon fiber or titanium frame. If you are not bicycle savvy, it’s perfectly fine to surf the internet and take along a “cheat sheet” with you, noting what type of metal alloy “trumps” another type.



There are countless manufacturers of bicycle frames but oftentimes what separates one model from another is the quality of the components. Any bike manufacturer can choose, for example, to put Shimano, SRAM, Campagnolo, Full Speed Ahead etc. components on their frames and what quality level of those components.

If components are stronger while weighing less, one can expect to pay more. For instance, a TIME saddle with carbon fiber rails only weighs 120 grams. There are other saddles that weigh as much as 655 grams. It should be no surprise that the TIME saddle costs about 12 times as much.

I suggest, for starters, that novices understand basic criteria for key components like derailleurs, shifters, brakes etc. And one needs to go beyond the overall brand name. For instance, Shimano offers numerous quality levels for components. One can purchase a Shimano XTR shifter, derailleur etc. But if XTR is too much for one’s pocketbook or level of cycling, Shimano offers Saint, XT, Hone, LX, Deore and Alivio mountain bike components in descending order of cost/quality. One does not need XTR to ride on the local bike path. For road bikes, one can choose from Shimano’s Dura-



Ace (most expensive) or Ultegra, 105, Tiagra or Sora (least expensive). SRAM offers comparable parts but with different names like Force and Rival for road parts and X.9, X.7 and 3.0 for mountain bike components.

Customers routinely ask me what tire, price wise, they should buy. I tell them the quality/price of their purchase needs to increase as their margin for error decreases. I'd recommend an inexpensive tire for someone riding on dirt roads in a campground. On the other hand, when our son competed in downhill racing, the tires on his bicycle cost more than the tires on his car! One does not want a blowout while careening down a boulder-strewn mountain. He also invested in an air shock that cost twice as much as a coil spring shock to reduce the odds that he would bounce off his metal steed.

Oh yes, the same philosophy is applied to brakes. I like to take my road bike on roads that have prolonged 7 percent grades (or more). I choose to purchase top-quality brakes in order to avoid a mishap and subsequent helicopter ride to the hospital.

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