

WHERE TO RIDE

Now that you have a properly-fit, good-quality bike, you are wondering where and with whom to ride. First the good news:

Paved bike paths are growing like weeds. Currently, the longest continuous section runs from Springfield to the outskirts of Cincinnati. A section running along Rt 35 connects to the Miami River Corridor path that runs through Dayton. Other as-yet-unconnected sections run along the old Miami-Erie Canal that parallels the Miami River. Needmore Road to Old Springfield is one chunk, then Tipp's section from Main Street to the nature center is the next. Tipp also has a small chunk from the new high school to 25A. Troy's begins from south of Dye Mill Road (about even with the Waco hangar), crosses the river on an old railroad bridge and goes north past the golf course to Troy Park. Another chunk in Troy makes a loop in Duke Park, just north of Troy Park. Piqua has probably the biggest network of paths of any small town nearby. Brookville and Englewood also have bits of path. Eventually, all these paths will connect into a continuous grid, as budgets permit. Bike paths are a great place for a leisurely cruise with the family.

The Miami Valley has some beautiful, pastoral, rolling country roads and a very active and sociable bike club (Dayton Cycling Club, www.daytoncyclingclub.org). Hooking up with other riders will put you on the fast track to bike knowledge, although one should take all such amateur advice with a grain of salt. For casual-paced rides, start with the Sunday morning ride from the CVS parking lot. A warning to newcomers: although some of the riders may be old enough to be your parents, they can often maintain their "casual pace" for quite some distance. If you have any doubts about your abilities, have a bail-out plan ready ahead of time.

For riders with road bikes looking to stretch their legs a bit more, bike legend Fred Lounsberry and associates run a ride out of Process Equipment's parking lot (www.fredsrider.org) on route 202. Riders of all levels show up for this ride but neophytes should probably hang toward the back until they develop the bike handling skills and etiquette (and lungs) to ride with the faster groups. Fast group rides will be very tightly spaced so one bad move will make a pile of expensive broken bikes and angry riders. As of Fall '07, the Dayton Metroparks has opened a mountain bike trail at Huffman Metropark near Wright-Patterson AFB. (For the latest riding conditions, please check these websites: www.fiveriversoutdoors.org or www.mtboho.org)

Now the bad news: challenging off-road dirt trails will generally require a drive to Caesar's Creek or Houston Woods (both 1 hour each way), although John Bryan State Park has more recently opened some trails to bikes (1/2-hour drive). Troy has a small smattering of trails behind Duke Park but the problem is a total lack of elevation change. Astonishingly, despite some potentially useful trails, all Miami County Parks forbid off-pavement bike use on any of their trails. Real off-roading will require a road trip to West Virginia or Kentucky.

BMX racing is a popular family activity and Dayton is a hotbed of racing. Dayton Indoor is located on Edmund Street in Dayton and is active November through April. This is a nice way to involve the entire family on a Sunday afternoon, whether racing or

spectating. Both Kettering and Brookville have outdoor tracks that are very active. Most tracks require helmets (some require full-face designs) and long-sleeve shirts and pants. Pads for the bike frames are also a must. Kickstands and chainguards are usually forbidden. Lacking a formal race schedule, many local kids head for the dirt paths in the area and focus more on jumping and style moves rather than flat-out speed.