

Decathlon stage wheely good class for bike beginners

Shoppers pushing their trolleys looked quizzically as cyclists clad in helmets and hi-vis jackets pushed their bikes past them heading for the customer lift in the Gyle Shopping Centre, and those sitting having a cup of tea in the upstairs cafe were even more bemused as the cyclists made their way to the back of the building.

Well, there was a simple answer. The cyclists were heading for a free bike maintenance class hosted by sports store Decathlon in a new resource centre at the popular shopping centre on the outskirts of Edinburgh.

The initiative follows a boom in cycling, prompted in part during the COVID-19 lockdown, and many cities, including Edinburgh, are building cycle paths to prompt more people to get on their bikes.

Cycling has boomed before. Think back to the early 1970s when sales were also strong and shops regularly ran out of stock. Would-be customers had to put their names on long waiting lists.

That was built on baby-boomer wealth, environmental concerns

and an interest in getting fit. The boom lasted for several years. Then habits changed.

However, the bike bonanza has returned and recently, I had to wait for almost a year to get my hands on an electric bike. Many are like me. However, the question is how many of the new converts know how to check their bikes, change a tyre or cure squeaks when they appear.

Well, Decathlon's 60-minute free course could assist.

We arrived at the Gyle and were directed to the lift by a welcoming customer care assistant who was well-briefed. Once upstairs, we met by Andre Martins, a team leader for the sports goods chain, who was standing at the top of the lift

He escorted us to a spacious, well-lit and thankfully, warm – it had been dreich with light rain on our 33-minute cycle to the venue, and there was a chilling fog in the air – room set up with four bike stands.

On a table were multi-tools, yellow tyre levers and an example of bike cleaning products. Also, there were rubber gloves. This was obviously going to be hands on.

Tom showed how to check your machine before going for a spin, looking at the wheel alignment, chain tension, moving to the saddle to see if it was in the correct position, then checking the alignment of the handlebars.

If adjustments were needed then a multi-tool is the key. They have them in their shop, but there was no sales pitch, just advice.

Then, we moved to explaining the difference between a schrader and presta valve on your tyre, before moving onto the art of repairing punctures, an everyday hazard and the most common problem experienced by a cyclist.

Tom turned the bike upside down before starting the process. He demonstrated then we followed, showing how to remove the front tyre and also the back wheel, a simple procedure if done properly by making sure the chain is on the smallest sprocket and then compressing the derailleur to allow the wheel to come loose.

He carefully placed the derailleur mechanism upwards on the floor to protect the system and then deflated the tyre using a notch in the tyre lever, pushing the tyre into the middle of the wheel (this was a schrader valve) to break the seal between the rubber and the metal wheel.

Then he inserted the tyre lever under the rim of the tyre followed by another between four and six inches apart. It is, he said, best to do this away from the valve area.

The trick is to press both the tyre levers together which should flip part of the tyre off the wheel. Once completed, he moved one of the tyre levers around the bead of the wheel to ensure that the tyre was free. Then he pushed the tyre back to removed the inner tube.

He explained how to find the puncture and check your tyre for the cause of the blow out before deftly showing how to reinsert the repaired tube or a spare tube – it is a good thing to carry one just in case the puncture is a big one – back into wheel, starting by pushing the valve back through the wheel, and then how to get you back on the road quickly.

There are tricks. For example, inserting the valve near the logo on the tyre, reseating the tyre using your hands placed at opposite sides of the wheel and squeezing the tyre to ensure that the tube is correctly seated so it will not be caught between the bead of the tyre and the wheel. That could lead to another puncture.

Once complete, the wheel was replaced on the bike. It looked simple until you try it yourself, and that was the best bit

about the course, it was hands on. Yes, I made a mess of the procedure, trying to replicate the hints I had been given, but I got there in the end and so did the other students.

We all benefited from the experience and so can you as Decathlon bosses will be hosting more courses in the same venue in the coming weeks. Watch for announcements on social media.

We said our thanks and made our way back into the mist and drizzle for the ride home. Thanks to Decathlon for this. We all felt more confident about dealing with roadside emergencies now.

PICTURE: expert shows some of the class how to align a front wheel.