

Spandex yielding to new cycling styles

By VIVIAN McINERNEY | THE OREGONIAN

Portland likes bikes.

The city just bumped from bronze to platinum status with the League of American Bicyclists; the Portland Office of Transportation celebrates "Bike to Work" month with a free breakfast on the public square Wednesday; and Oregon Ballet Theatre has a "Bike to the Ballet" promotion in the works.

Our politicians pose with bicycles as often as with babies. Even when cameras aren't around.

People sitting in cars during rush-hour traffic are punished by a parade of pedaling neon, Lycra, padded tushes.

That might be fair, but it's not right.

Those skintight, quick-wicking, aerodynamic outfits are essential for long, hard rides, but some cyclists find simple street clothes are fine for everyday commuting. It's purely practical. They don't have time to change

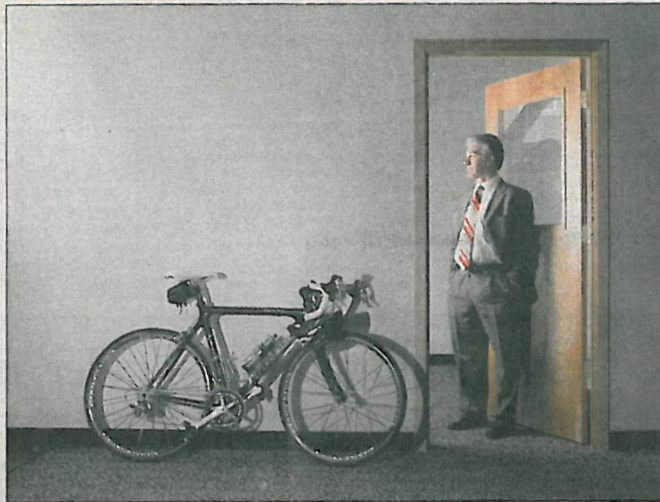
clothes every time they hop on their bike, which can be several times a day. They don't want to show up for business meetings wearing embarrassingly tight shorts. Not even Lance Armstrong looks good in those things. And they aren't willing to sacrifice professional polish with a pair of machine washable jeans.

Clothing companies are catching on. Bike shops now offer designs in stretch silks and merino wools meant to work as well on a bicycle as in a boardroom. Jackets feature backflaps to protect from street spray when a cyclist is bent over the handlebars, then fasten to hip length for the office. Saddle and messenger bags convert to purses for carrying around town. It's a start. But it's not quite fashion yet.

In the meantime, some commuters hit the road wearing Italian suits and ties, push pedals after donning their favorite high heels or ride their step-through bikes with floral print dresses flowing behind them.

They improve the environment, and not just in a carbon-emissions way, but a fashion way. And for that, many are grateful.

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Photos by BETH NAKAMURA/THE OREGONIAN
Rick Potestio commutes to his architecture job in his suit. Most efficient: tucking his pants into his socks. "I'm all over the city," he says, "almost like a bike messenger."



Jessica Roberts goes retro with her wicker basket and Raleigh bicycle — and her haircut goes with her helmet. Her cycle-commuting advice: "You have to test drive your skirt to see what files up."

▲ Jessica Roberts, planner, Alta Planning + Design

Geared to go: "I have a cute old Raleigh, brown and cream with a wicker basket. It's just so cute. I want to make sure I look cute riding it. It's my summer-dress bike. I bought a vintage housewife dress from the same era. I figured they'd get along."

Life cycle: "My bike is my main form of transportation. That's not OK if I have to dress like a schlub."

Bike trick: "You have to test drive your skirt to see what files up."

Changing gears: "I love to show up to the opera or ballet wearing really ugly rain clothes and peel them off and have something nice underneath."

Helmet head: "I chose my haircut to go with my helmet."

Chain, chain, chain: "This is totally unscientific, but I'm convinced it's true. When the weather is warm and I am dressed, I swear, drivers are nicer to me. Maybe a girl in a skirt on a bike makes them nostalgic for the '50s so they're in a better mood. Or maybe I am."

▲ Rick Potestio, architect

Geared to go: "I wear suits, usually. You never have to decide what to wear. It's easy to maintain."

Life cycle: "I'm 52 and only owned a car for about six years. I've always lived in dense, inner-city neighborhoods whether it was Boston, Cambridge or Portland. I go up and down town six times a day. I'm all over this city almost like a bike messenger. I ride a racing-style bike — not a commuter — but I fender it up for fall."

Cycle 'tone: "The last thing you want to do is show up at a construction site in Lycra. I'd get laughed off the job site."

Backpedaling: "I used to have gaiters to try to keep spray water from my suit pants, but it's not that big of a deal. A good suit sheds the water, and even if you're a little damp, you look better than you would showing up in some geek attire."

Hit the brakes: "The most efficient way is to tuck your pants into your socks. No, that's not geeky."

Easy rider: "You can coast most of downtown, so I wasn't getting any exercise (when he lived on the east side), so I walked my bike across the bridge and used that time to talk on the phone, then had my bike for commuting between meetings."

Helmet hair: "I have Sicilian hair, and it does what it's going to do. I keep it really short."

Spokes-man: "Avoid backpacks and knapsacks that sit on the back because they make you sweat. Go for shoulder bags that sit on the hip — bike messengers know what they're doing. Wear whatever you have to ride a bike and feel safe."

Chain, chain, chain: "If it's really dumping rain, sometimes you just have to hop a cab."

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Cycling: Ignore the rain and pay dearly when ride ends

Continued from Page D1

Michelle Poyourow,

Bicycle Transportation Alliance
advocate, educator

Geared to go: "I like to wear dresses when I bike, and my preferred footwear is cowboy boots because they keep feet dry and look cool."

Bike tricks: Shuns her racing bike to pedal a cruiser – "the kind of bike you rode as a kid" – because the upright design is "amiable for dressing up."

Cycle 'tone: "When I go out in my burly rain pants and tech gear, I'm an 'other,' and drivers can't relate. When I'm a girl in a dress in heels ... I get a whole lane to myself."

Spokes-woman: "Leggings are a good secret. I went to the ballet last weekend and wore a nice A-line skirt with leggings, then just yanked them up so they didn't show."

Backpedaling: "I have gone out in a miniskirt and had to stand up for the entire trip or pull it up around my waist to ride."

Chain, chain, chain: "It was raining when I left the house, and I willfully ignored it. By the time I got back at the end of the night, I was so wet that I took off my boots, turned them upside down and about a cup of water came out of each."

Mia Birk,

principal, Alta Planning +
Design

Geared to go: "I don't wear spiky heels anywhere, but I wear a good two-inch heel all the time – even while riding."

Life cycle: "When I grew up in Texas, I got in the car and that's



BETH NAKAMURA/THE OREGONIAN

Mia Birk bicycles in "a good two-inch heel" – although she leaves the spiky ones at home. She drops her kids off, cycles downtown and then back to school to pick them up.

just what you did. Now, I'm that way with a bike."

Pedal pusher: "I drop my kids off, ride downtown and then back to school to pick them up. (Her daughter rides in a sidecar; her son pedals his own bike.) I ride to meetings during the day."

Bike trick: "I use a medical clip, like you would use to clip off a medical vein," to hold flowy skirts or pants out of spokes' harm."

Backpedaling: "I was wearing a pair of those really flowy pants from Anthropologie ... and the fabric got caught in my brakes. I was standing there, and I couldn't

get them out. There are a few limits to what you can wear."

Helmet head: "My helmet has pink decorations on it. I like to match my outfits."

Changing gear: "Wear different breathable layers ... then layer up or strip down."

Chain, chain, chain: "Padded shorts can never be sexy."

Spokes-woman: "We get our exercise. But we're not getting sweaty."

Catherine Ciarlo,

executive director, Oregon
Women Lawyers

Geared to go: "When I work downtown, I wear what I am going to wear. I have little kids and meetings and schedule things closely, so it's not practical to change into a completely different outfit. So, yeah, I wear heels when I bike to be practical."

Life cycle: "There are times when I get on my bike and people's faces register surprise. I like that. I don't mind being unpredictable."

Bike trick: "When it's really raining, it's no fun if you are aware of the fact that the clothes you just sent to the cleaner are going to have to go again. Rain pants are a key part of the whole deal. You can pull rain pants over a skirt as long as it's fluid enough."

Amsterdam it: "Talk about riding bikes in tight, short skirts! They all have fabulous bodies in Amsterdam, but there's only so far you want to push it."

Helmet hair: "I recently got a haircut that requires less perfection. On days when I have a big event and feel my hair needs to look perfect, I take the bus."

Spokes-woman: "If you are riding your bike in heels and a dress, you are not interested in going fast."

Chain, chain, chain: "In the pouring rain, you are going to have to do something about makeup when you get to work."