

# Fabulous fun on two wheels

## Youth cycling programs get underway, teach skills for life

There are few things in life as inspiring as riding a bike. Just ask Ana Large who, at 15, has already logged hundreds of kilometres on her bike and expects to ride tens of thousands more in the decades ahead.

Large's passion for cycling has been nurtured by her involvement with the Red Devils Cycling Academy, a Kelowna-based club for riders ages 10 to 17 who want to boost their cycling skills.

The Red Devils are not – repeat, not – a racing club. And while many of its members do make the leap into racing, the club's main purpose is to teach young cyclists how to ride a bike safely, how to ride it well and to have fun in the process.

Large insists the club succeeds on all counts, especially the last. "It's fun. It's always fun," she says emphatically.

There was a time in the not-so-distant past when bikes were fairly simple contraptions and learning how to ride one was pretty simple too. A few wobbles, maybe a scraped knee or elbow and voila, you were on your way.



For some, that's still the case today. But like much in society, bikes and cycling have become far more sophisticated. Bikes now are faster, lighter and engineered for different terrains. Riding one requires a different set of skills, particularly when riding in groups of two or more.

That's where the Red Devils Cycling Academy comes in. Now in its fourth season, it exists to teach the fundamentals of mountain and road riding.

It's aimed at "young riders who are already enthusiastic but want to learn more," says Brandon Archer, the Red Devils' program director.

Training is tailored to different age groups. For those ages 10 and 11, the emphasis is on drills or games that teach stopping, turning and bike handling. Older riders are schooled in faster-paced techniques of descending, climbing, cornering, sprinting and riding in groups.

There are further lessons on nutrition, clothing and mechanical necessities such as changing a flat. And at all times, Archer says, the emphasis is on “keeping it fun and safe.”

Large praises the sense of community and camaraderie that comes with being part of the Red Devils. When she broke her leg in a ski accident on Big White this winter “Brandon and all the Red Devils were very supportive,” she says.

When it began four years ago, enrolment in the Red Devils was capped at 20 riders. This year the club hopes to attract 80 riders to its spring programs of differing intensities and duration (10 weeks and 16 weeks). All coaches are nationally certified.



Ana Large

Asked if she would recommend the Red Devils to others, Large replies without hesitation: “Yes I would recommend it, whether you’re just starting or an advanced rider. It’s all great fun at different levels.”

Archer shares that enthusiasm but from a coach’s point of view. It gives him a special thrill, he says, to see a young rider master a new technique or start to ride solo.

Indeed, he takes such satisfaction from coaching that he is also the regional coordinator for the iRide program developed by Cycling BC, the provincial cycling association and subsidized by private donors.

Starting in April, iRide is run through local schools and offers three days of training to pupils in Grades 4 to 6 who already know how to ride a bike and wish to improve. Riders may use their own bikes or borrow one from the iRide trailer.

Like the Red Devils, iRide helps to develop cycling skills and to foster self confidence, says Archer.

For more information on the Red Devils, visit their website at: <http://www.reddevilsicycling.com/>

For information and videos on the iRide program, go to: <https://cyclingbc.net/iride/>