



FIT FOR LIFE

On the road again

Carol Westmorland joins the 'secret club' of hybrid bike owners - and finds happiness at the wheel

It seems I have been excluded (or left on the outside) and for quite some time. A secret 'club' has been kept from me.

It wasn't that I hadn't shown any interest. I had, and on each occasion I was led to believe that you were either one or the other and that the two didn't mix. Mixing would be disloyal, it would dilute what you stood for. One side would snigger at the other and both would believe the other less superior. Possibly going so far as to ignore the other when passing.

Pass they would often do on quiet country lanes and this was the problem. One was 'allowed' to use those roads the other, well, no. They were classed as 'off-road' and didn't this mean they had no business being there? They should be on the other side of the hedge. On their bikes.

Circumstances change and whole new worlds can open up when you least expect them. This stand-off is no more. A fellow club cyclist announced with no shame that everyone has one. They do? Who knew?

Father, who I have to say influenced my beliefs, joined this secret club last winter. This I knew. It was strictly on a needs must understanding. Three inches of snow had to have fallen first.

My previous self would have been very sniffy about being seen on this 'hybrid' bike. Straight handlebars mean I have that sticking-out elbows look. I can climb hills without needing to stretch my arm beyond its present state and I can grip the bars



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with my wonky hands and since this all came about I am very happy.

I can't easily move this bike - when I am off it - I have to bump it along and it weighs about 35lbs, when my road bikes will average around 20lbs, but that doesn't matter. What matters is that I feel safe. I am hugging the road. Grit, sand, mud it can handle it all.

The only grit in the chain ring well - it is not mine, as said earlier, it is father's. He will ask for it back.

I am tempted to choose a cyclo cross bike. It looks to the poor sighted to be a road bike. I may well go down this new tried and tested road and a better person I will be for it and as I have discovered I am not alone. After all we are all in this together.

Carol Westmorland lives in Cumrew. She is a Cycling Time Trials national champion, clocking up 445 miles in 24 hours. She also teaches pilates.