



We're a happy bunch: Walk leader Ann Oswin front left, with some of the Happy Wanderers from Brampton

PAULA PAISLEY

# Happy wanderers

Walking group set up for the over-50s to explore area's beauty spots

**W**alking is the one form of aerobic exercise that almost everyone can take – and there's no better place to do it than in beautiful surroundings.

That is the thinking behind a fitness group set up for the over-50s and based in Brampton.

The Happy Wanderers, as the group is called, meets every Tuesday morning for a gentle walk around some of the many beauty spots near the town.

Around 12 walkers gather at Brampton Community Centre at 9.30am and are taken by minibus to the starting point.

They follow one of 20 different circular routes, chosen by walk leader Ann Oswin by agreement with the other walkers. They take in areas such as Talkin Tarn, the River Eden at Armathwaite or Wetheral, the RSPB reserve at Geltsdale, Unity Farm, Hadrian's Wall from Newton Irthington, Castle Carrock or the River Esk at Longtown. The bus then takes them back to the community centre for tea or coffee at around 11.30am.

BY STEPHEN BLEASE



"We are lucky with where we live, because we've got access to some beautiful countryside," Ann explains. "There are such a lot of lovely routes not far from Brampton."

"On the walks we always see different birds, trees, flowers and fungi, or there will be a bit of history along the way, so photographers are in Heaven. There's always something of interest."

As a group aimed at older people the walks are never very long, or brisk. "We take about an hour and a half over them and we go at a leisurely pace," Ann says. "The walks are no more than three miles – and it's more likely that we'll walk about two miles."

The group was set up for the over-50s and many of the regulars are over 70, but Ann insists they are not prescriptive. "If you are a younger person that's fine. We don't turn

anybody away – we're happy to have anyone join us."

The Happy Wanderers are producing a calendar featuring photos from the walks which is going on sale in aid of the Brampton Community Association. It will cost £5 and will be available from the community centre. A leaflet entitled "On Your Doorstep" is also available there detailing five of the routes.

Ann adds that another health benefit the group offers is the chance to meet other people and socialise, which she sees as particularly important for older people living alone.

"The mental wellbeing it brings is a big part of it," she says. "Some of the walkers stay on and have lunch at the community centre afterwards. It's a friendship group as much as anything else."

Taking part in the walk is free but there is a charge of £1.50 to cover transport in the minibus.

Anyone wanting more information should contact the community centre on 01697 745023 or phone Ann on 01228 675684.

# How to buy a bike that fits perfectly

By Carol Westmorland champion cyclist and Pilates instructor



**F**or a number of years I tested female specific bikes and kit for *Cycling Plus* magazine. On one occasion I spent a glorious sunny day peddling around Bristol being photographed for a piece entitled *Speeding Women on Trial*.

I am guilty of forgetting my past experiences and often, when asked, dismiss the point of buying a female specific bike. I think it would be fair to say that I was quite a heavy handed tester. On one memorable test ride I managed to pull the rear mech' into the back wheel.

I digress. The point I am making is that I do know a thing or two about these things. In my stable I have a variety of bikes.

In the first place, when purchasing your bike you need to have a fair degree of knowledge.

This, of course, can come with experience but the basics like recognising that the bike builder has simply put a female specific saddle on the bike and then called it a female bike may be hard to see if you haven't done your homework first.

I wouldn't recommend that you buy a bike that has been specifically designed for a female but rather that you buy a bike that is a perfect fit.

Knowing what to look for is very important.



Cruise control: Don't simply buy a bike that has been specifically designed for a female but rather one that is a perfect fit

You need to look at the geometry of the bike. Bike builders assume that typically a female has a short torso and longer legs which is far too general and wrong.

This would mean the bike will be in a more upright position when riding, which is neither aerodynamic nor helpful should you wish to race or take part in a sportive where your position will

be an advantage for speed.

Choosing a bike that will last means spending some time weighing up what you will need.

There aren't many roads in Cumbria that do not have a gradient. Avoiding a bike that rides like a tractor when you are going to be negotiating hills is a must.

For every £50 more you spend the specification is

vastly improved.

Bike sizes mean nothing because the top tubes vary so much. The top tube is the piece of the frame that in the old days was missing on ladies bikes. It is important that the foundation of the bike, the frame, is right. In my view a more compact (smaller) frame will allow you to make adjustments. The most obvious example would be the seat tube.

You must have balance; if you need to lower the saddle leaving barely any tubing displayed then the frame size is not right for you – it is too big. Look at the set up and recognise whether the bike looks 'right'.

Female specific bikes often have a slack head-tube. This means it is angled from the top, towards the seat, leaving a narrower gap between handlebars and seat and consequently gives a more compact less stretched position.

An aluminium frame tends to dampen road vibration whereas carbon fibre will help you to hold your speed on the flat. Personally, I like the solidness and longevity of a steel frame.

While testing equipment for *Cycling Plus* magazine I spent many happy days putting lots of gear through the test. I can safely say that no manufacturer has yet come up with a saddle that avoids saddle pain completely – particularly when you do endurance miles – and why would they? We are not designed to perch on anything unforgiving and leather.

The handlebar height should

be lower than the seat to allow you to distribute your weight evenly and be more aerodynamic. My preference is to ride on the tops. Some handlebars have an 'ergo bump' which allows your hands to comfortably fit the shape.

A good rule of thumb is that the width of the handlebar should be the same width as your shoulders – 38 to 40cm is typical.

It may be tempting to go for a wider bar than you need for a more stable ride but I would recommend that you go for the narrower option to enjoy a more responsive ride.

Tri-bars with bar-end shifters make it possible to be aerodynamic but, if your preference is to ride on the drops, you will need to be able to reach the brakes. Sounds obvious, but some bike builders don't consider that small hands are unable to reach the brakes with certainty. Short brake levers make it possible to ride on the drops safely even when you have smaller hands.

Traditionally, female specific bikes tend to have lower gearing. Gears work using chain rings (the front cogs), of which there are usually two. Triple chain rings are only required if you intend to ascend the side of a building.

There is a whole world of choice out there. Having just a bit of knowledge will go a long way; it will help you develop your confidence in a sport that can capture your passion. You may just start a love affair that will just run and run.

# How to help yourself in our winter wonderland

IT'S THAT time of year again – the first snow has arrived on the fells and hardy, four-season fell-walkers will be dusting off their ice axes and crampons in readiness for more serious winter conditions.

I was up on High Street last week and, although the snow cover was relatively light, there were times when I felt a little uneasy.

The wind had caused deep drifts to pile up in one or two places, and walking on top of them – not knowing if they would hold my weight and oblivious to what might lie beneath – was unnerving.

I came crashing through the icy crust on a few occasions, jolting myself, but never going deeper

Guidebook writer Viv Crow shares her love of the great outdoors



dark. (As it happened, we got back to the car just after sunset, so there was still enough light in the sky to walk without a torch.)

I knew I had enough food to keep me going for hours. (It's not just because I'm greedy that I keep several snack bars hidden away under my waterproofs!)

In the event of an emergency, I had a basic first aid kit, a whistle (and torch) to summon help and a lightweight 'bothy bag', big enough for two people to take shelter from the wind, the rain and the cold.

Much more snow and I'd be reluctant to head on to high, steep ground; I'm not experienced with ice-axe and crampons, although I hope to put that right this winter.



Even if you are not intending to venture out on to the fells in full-blown winter conditions, it is worth checking your day-sack to make sure you have everything you need should things go wrong while you are out walking.

And do you know how to use those potentially life-saving bits of kit? The distress signal, for

example, should you need help on the mountains, is six flashes on your torch or six long whistle-blasts in the space of one minute, repeated at one-minute intervals.

Then there's first aid... I like to think I could administer first-aid treatment if I came across an accident victim, but it's been a few years since I had any training in the basics such as cardiopulmonary resuscitation and how to deal with bleeding or fractures.

I've actually booked myself on a course dealing specifically with first aid on the fells, so this should act as a refresher. Maybe it's not an essential skill for all fell-walkers, but I'd hate to come across an injured person and not be able to help.

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