

# A Bike for Pelotonia

By Donn Young

So you've registered for Pelotonia and that old bike from Gold Circle isn't up to making the trip. A number of folks have asked for help in picking out a new bike to ride on the Pelotonia tour. While I can't tell you exactly what to buy and where, here are some tips to make sure you get a bike that will be right for both you and the ride.

- **Buy your bike at a bike store.** The salespeople are knowledgeable bike folks who will make sure you get the right bike fitted just for you [yes, bikes come in different sizes]. Plus, they'll be there for repairs and tune-ups [every new bike comes with a tune-up]. This just won't happen if you buy your bike at a large department store. Your bike might cost a bit more at a bike shop, but you'll know it's worth it on the second day of Pelotonia.
- **Buy a road bike or what's called a sports road bike.** This type of bike is lightweight and has dropped handlebars and thin tires. It's similar to a road racing bike, but has a frame that's a bit more comfortable. A sturdy mountain bike with fat tires won't do – it's just too heavy. Within the first mile, you'll start to be challenged to keep up with the road bikes. You won't be riding on gravel trails or going cross-country. Road bikes are lighter and, most importantly, have narrower tires with less rolling resistance. Tell the bike store folks about Pelotonia – that you'll be doing back-to-back centuries [two 100 mile rides] - and they'll fix you up with the right bike.
- **Get a bike with dropped handlebars.** You can pick a bike with either upright or dropped handlebars. While the upright bars might feel more comfortable at first, after you've gotten some training miles in, you'll find the lower position with the dropped bars much more aerodynamic and efficient. The dropped bars will feel strange at first, but don't worry, you'll get used to them!
- **Get a bike with triple cranks** - that's three gears on the front. Pelotonia is headed to Athens where you'll ride some serious hills. The small gear on the front is called a 'granny' gear and when coupled with a larger rear gear, it'll get you up the steeper hills. You won't set any speed records, but you'll make it up the hills without walking. Make sure your bike has a touring saddle with gel cushioning.

## ***How Much Will My Bike Cost?***

Ah yes, money... When you start looking at bikes, you might be surprised at how much they cost. While I bought a top-of-the-line racing bike with Italian components in 1971 for \$275, you won't even find a decent low-end bike at that cost today. I've taken a look at bike shops, both local and chain stores, and found that you buy a bike meeting the points above for \$400-\$500. Yep, that much. Anything less and your Pelotonia experience will be memorable for all the wrong reasons. Plus, afterwards you'll be looking for a new bike for next year's ride. If you get a decent bike, you'll be able to delay the urge to buy a better one.

To save some money, you might want to get a used bike, but if you're not that familiar with bikes, a used bike might be more trouble than the money you save.

However, if you've got the money, bike shops will be happy to sell you a sleek carbon-fiber bike with Zipp wheels for \$7,000. You'll look great, but when you're struggling to keep up, folks will know you're not Lance Armstrong.

## ***Other Biking Accoutrement***

Now, after spending all that money on a bike, you'll still need more stuff before you hit the road. Here's some 'don't leave home without it' and some optional equipment that will make Pelotonia more enjoyable and fun.

Here's the ***“Don't leave home without it”*** list:

- **Helmet.** Don't leave the store without buying a bike helmet. And don't even go for a practice spin on your bike without putting it on. You have to take the pledge, “I promise never to get on my bike without wearing my helmet.” Now say it again. All helmets are certified, so any will do – but make sure it's a bike helmet, not a skateboarding or skiing helmet. I've seen them on sale for \$19 and over \$200, pick one that meets your budget and style.
- **Cell Phone.** Not really a 'bike' item, but for safety reasons, you need to bring it along.
- **Cycling Shorts.** Pick up a pair of cycling shorts with padding in the butt. Yes, they'll feel funny at first, but after riding 90-100 miles in a day, if you aren't wearing them, your behind won't be smiling. \$30-\$80.
- **Gloves.** After a long day on your bike, you'll probably suffer numbness in your hands or Cyclist's Palsy caused by pressure on the nerves in your palm. You can keep this to a minimum by wearing padded cycling gloves and by having a bike that fits. You can usually find gloves on sale at bike shops – look for gel padding. And yes, the fingers are cut off so you don't get a whole glove. \$15-\$30.
- **Tools.** You'll need a few tools. The tour will have some people cruising about looking for broken down bikes to fix, but you're better off fixing it yourself and getting on your way. You'll need:
  - a tire pump [the kind that fits on the bike - \$20-\$30],
  - a small tool kit [like a Swiss Army knife with bike tools - \$5-\$15],
  - tire levers [to help remove your tire and tube - \$4],
  - Presta adapter [lets you use a regular tire pump on a Presta tire valve - \$2]
  - a spare inner tube and patch kit [yes, tires do get flats - \$5], and
  - a small seat bag to carry them in [it attaches under your seat - \$10-\$30].
- **Water Bottle Cage.** You'll need holders for your water bottles. These cages bolt onto the frame of the bike - have them installed when you buy your bike. The store might throw in a free water bottle, but if you're like most of us, you've got several lying around. Under \$10.
- **Cycling Shoes.** I hesitated putting shoes in the 'don't leave' list, but I can't imagine riding 100 miles in my old Nike's. Cycling shoes have a hard sole that spreads your weight over your entire foot. With athletic shoes, the weight will be focused on the ball of your foot and you'll walk funny when you get off the bike. I'd go with cleats as well, but you can leave them off if they seem a bit scary – you'll eventually get them. Look for shoes with a sole that allows you to walk easily. \$35-\$299.

If you've got money left over and want some more bike 'toys', here you go:

- **Cycle computer.** The computer is an upgraded speedometer with all sorts of things to tell you – probably some of which you don't want to know [“I know we've been riding at least 20 mph and this thing says 14!”]. It attaches to your handlebars and gets data from a sensor that fits on your front fork that senses the passing of a small magnet on your spokes. I've seen simple wireless ones on sale for under \$20.
- **Lights.** These go above in the essential list if you plan to ride at night, but you'll be done long before dark on Pelotonia. The new LED lights are bright, light, and relatively cheap. If you ride only occasionally at night you can get a head/tail light combo for \$20-30. And yes, you can get xenon HID lights for your bike, but be prepared to spend \$400-\$500.

- **Racks/Carriers/Bags/Panniers.** Pelotonia has sag wagon service to haul your overnight stuff so you won't need to carry it. If you'd like to do some bike touring, get a rear rack and bags to carry your gear. You'll need to make sure that your bike has fittings on the seat stays to bolt your rack to.
- **GPS.** Yes, Elizabeth, there is a Santa and he'll bring you a bike GPS unit if you're a good girl. However, GPS takes all the fun out of getting lost and riding an extra 20 miles. These mount on your handlebars next to – or in place of – your bike computer.
- **Cycling jersey.** I did mention style earlier. Instead of that ratty old 'Race for the Cure' t-shirt, a colorful jersey will make you look good and ride faster. You might look for the OSU jersey with Brutus Buckeye if you're still trying to get over the Fiesta Bowl loss. If you're going to be part of a team, everyone needs the same jersey and you'll look great. Jerseys have pockets in the back for carrying food, spare tires, etc. \$20-\$200.

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