

FAMILY BIKING

THE PARENT'S
GUIDE TO
 **SAFE
CYCLING**

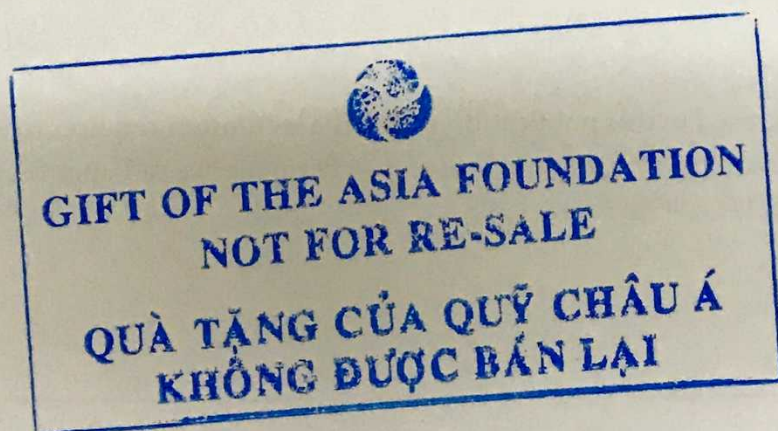


ROBERT AND CHRISTIE HURST

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The Parent's Guide to Safe Cycling

Robert and Christie Hurst



FALCON GUIDES

GUILFORD, CONNECTICUT
HELENA, MONTANA

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The authors and Rowman & Littlefield assume no liability for accidents happening to, or injuries sustained by, readers or children who engage in the activities described in this book.

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Introduction

What is family biking? The term could refer to a slow cruise on a neighborhood bike path, a serious commute, or a shopping trip. We know of one dad who carried his kid up and over Independence Pass on a cargo bike. That qualifies. But the critical ingredient is kids. If you're riding with your kid(s), whether they be on board your own bike or cruising next to you on theirs, you're family biking. And that's the purpose of this book: To give biking parents who want to ride with their kids information on the issues that concern them most. From pregnant biking to teaching children to ride safely, it's all in here.

That's not us on the cover. We kind of wish it were. We're not that hot.

And we rarely get out for a recreational ride the likes of which these fine-looking young people appear to be enjoying. Almost all of our riding with our daughter, Bea, is utilitarian transport. Not that we think riding her to the daycare isn't fun. It is most of the time. Certainly it's a lot more fun than trying to drive there, which is a level of Hell. Every time we try to make that drive, we shake our fists at the sky and scream, Why?! Whyyyy?

On our bikes the trip is much more interesting, and also it seems much easier. It's definitely as fast or faster than it is in a car. We're lucky to have one of the world's fanciest bike paths—almost like a highway for bikes—within a few blocks of our house, running almost the whole way there, slipping beneath all the streets and intersections. If that fantastic infrastructure weren't in place, our bike commute would have a very different feel. Most family bikers aren't so lucky.

We're far from the most experienced family bikers out there. We readily admit to that. While we ride with her a lot, we only have one kid to haul around. There are moms and dads out there riding three kids—or more—every day, car-free. We can't hold a candle to them. They have figured out so much more than we have about the logistics and associated equipment of baby-hauling. About babies in general. But we've certainly been on our bikes much more than the average Jane and Joe. Between the two of us we have almost thirty years of bike messenger experience. Robert wrote several biking guides, and Christie pedals a 30-mile round-trip commute year-round, and kept it up through her pregnancy. We've paid our pedaling dues.

One way to do it: a city cruiser pulling a Weehoo trailer. *Courtesy Weehoo*

To fill in the gaps in our experience and to glean insights, we had conversations with as many family bikers as we could find, people with wide-ranging backgrounds. Even if you think you know everything, how will you know for sure unless you listen to others? We glommed on shamelessly to others' knowledge. Big thanks especially to Clarise Jenkins, Jonathan Maus, Alexis Rohde, Patrick Barber, Sally Ruiz, Kathy Steinhauer, Paul Stuckey, Rita Geller, Danielle Givens, and Kathy Gillis, whose contributions were not only crucial but cool.

One of the themes we came away with while compiling the info here is that every one of the available methods of family biking—front seat, rear seat, trailer, *bakfiets* (you'll learn some Dutch and Danish in this book), cargo trike, long-tail, tandem, or trailer bike—has its own certain coolness about it. We think some work better than others, but each has unique advantages. Each is particularly useful in its own way, and none is perfect.

The resulting book has three parts. **Part One** starts in the womb, with Christie's look at biking while pregnant. It then tackles some of the snarliest questions in family biking, like how young is too young to put a kid on a bike? What's the best way to carry an infant, if any? How should parents ride when carrying their kids? Is excessive vibration going to scramble your kid's brain? **Part Two** is the buyer's guide for family biking products, discussing everything from youth helmets to kids' first pedal bicycles. **Part Three** concerns itself with the issues that arise when the child is old enough to go pedaling off on her own.

Family biking is not without controversies, and this book does not shy away from them. Readers will learn about several, starting with a close look at kids' helmets and helmet standards that will surprise and anger some readers. We reexamine the American bias against bike-mounted child seats: As it so often does, the conventional wisdom got it all wrong. We debate the alleged safety of trailers, question the physics of rear-loaded cargo bikes, and throw the entire concept of training wheels off the Golden Gate Bridge. Finally, we won't shy away from the scariest question of all: Is it safe for my child to ride on the streets? This is a question we'll struggle with in our own family before too long.

About the Buyer's Guide

We took many of the photos, but also requested stock photos from the manufacturers. We thank them for giving us permission to use their photos and apologize if they sent us something that didn't get used.



One of the smallest balance bikes available, the Kinderbike E-Series has a tiny steel frame and a choice of pneumatic tires on alloy rims or airless on plastic rims. *Courtesy Kinderbike*

In no case has any manufacturer or seller of any of these products given us any product, payment, discount, or deal. (With one exception: FirstBIKE sent us a balance bike after the book was written and being edited.) Our sole contact with these companies has been to request product photos and ask occasional questions. Some of the small builders were very generous in answering questions about their products and about the industry in general. We're very happy to showcase relatively tiny businesses that don't have big corporate connections or advertising budgets, and that don't cut corners on quality. Unfortunately their stuff is usually really expensive, so we don't get to actually own much of it.

Products mentioned are not necessarily intended to be endorsements of those products. Certainly, not all the products listed perform in a really stellar way in the field. We felt it was important to list products for a wide range of budgets, but it wasn't our intention to produce comprehensive lists of every family biking product available. Undoubtedly some cool products were left out, and maybe a few uncool products are included that should not have been. It was not our intention to disappoint or upset anybody in the industry, so if there are any ruffled feathers from perceived slights, omissions,



The benefits of family biking—beyond just getting from point A to point B—will last a lifetime. *Thinkstock*

or inaccuracies, we did not intend it. We'd like to see a whole lot more family biking and a whole lot more family biking products being purchased in this world.

Prices

Listing prices in a book is problematic because you know those prices are all going to be different before too long, probably before the book can be updated. But we thought it was important to list them in order to give potential buyers useful information for comparing the specifics of different products. In almost all cases we have listed the manufacturer's suggested retail price. Just be aware that the listed prices may have changed or that some products could be available for different prices from different outlets.