

Learning to Ride

child's work is play. Learning to ride a bike should be a natural extension of that play. It is one of the great moments of childhood, the sudden discovery that you can ride a bike, the sense of triumph at being able to propel yourself along. It should be easy, yet so often we get it wrong by trying to *teach* a child to ride instead of letting the child *discover* how to ride. A common mistake is to add a set of stabilisers to the two-wheeler of a child who cannot ride. They prevent the child from experiencing the balance the bike requires. The process outlined here works because it is built around letting the child learn at his or her own speed. It works for countless children and it has never failed. Make every step fun, don't hurry it, and move on only when the child is ready and wants to try something new.

THE RIGHT BIKE

To aid confidence, a child should learn on the bike that he or she is going to ride regularly. It should be set up so that the child's hands can reach the brake levers easily.



SEAT HEIGHT: The height of the seat is what gives a child confidence, and should always be at a lower than ideal height for riding (see pp.20-21 for correct sizes). Once the child can ride, raise the saddle bit by bit until it is at the optimal height.

WRONG WAY TO LEARN

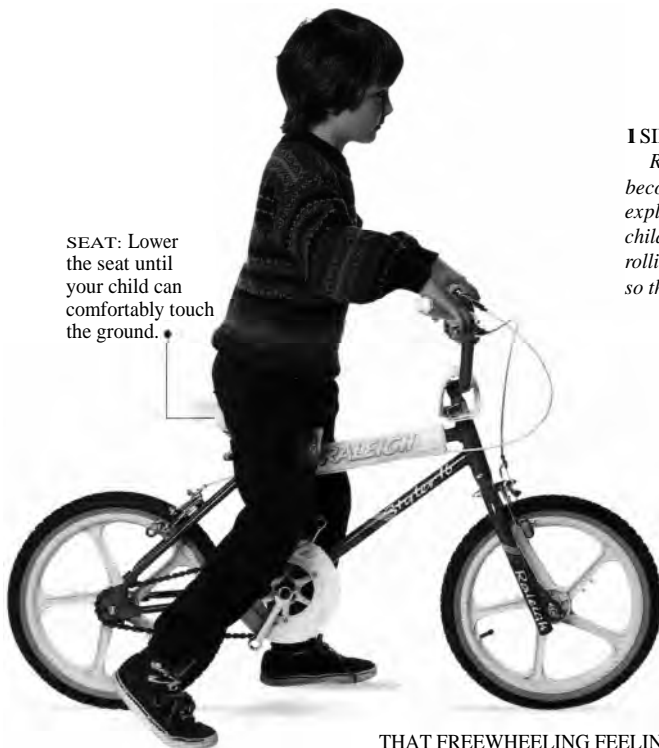
Running behind, holding the back of the saddle and waiting to let go, is the hit-and-miss method. If you're lucky, the child starts pedalling and will forget that your hand is no longer there. Invariably, when you take your hand off, your child's confidence and sense of balance disappear with it. All you've done is create unnecessary anxiety in your child.



1 SIMPLE BALANCE AND CONTROL

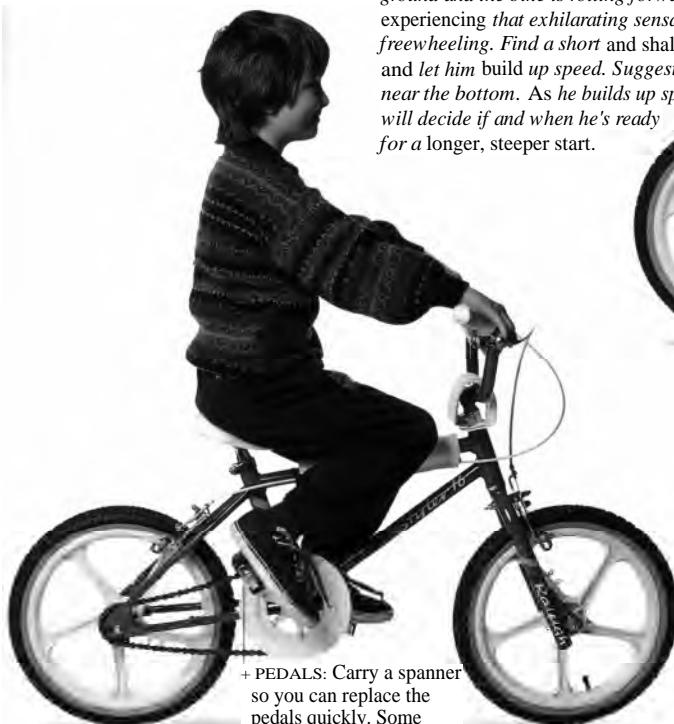
Remove the pedals from the crank arms so the bike becomes a hobby-horse. Start off on flat, open ground, explain how to use the brakes, and encourage your child to push along using alternate feet. Once he's rolling, encourage him to experiment with the brakes so that he can slow down and stop the bike.

SEAT: Lower the seat until your child can comfortably touch the ground.

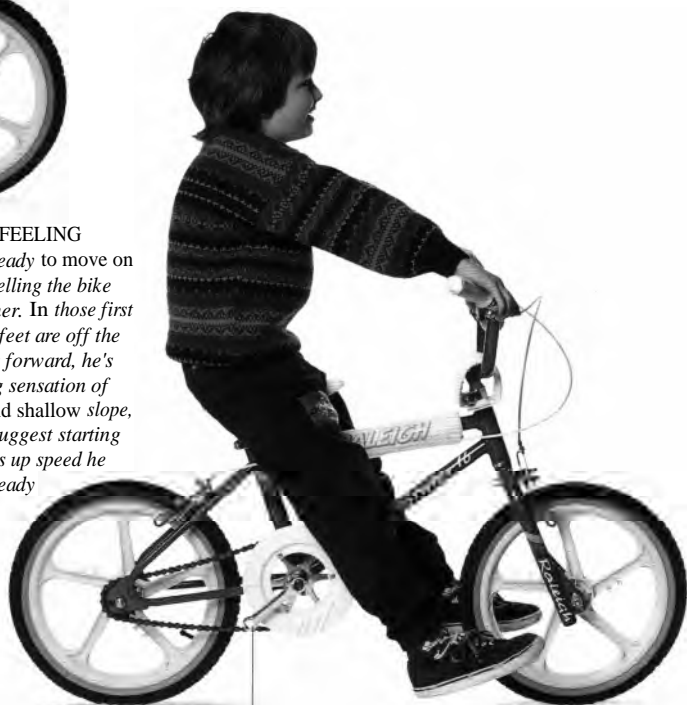


2 THAT FREEWHEELING FEELING

As soon as your child is ready to move on to the next step, suggest propelling the bike forward with both feet together. In those first few short seconds when both feet are off the ground and the bike is rolling forward, he's experiencing that exhilarating sensation of freewheeling. Find a short and shallow slope, and let him build up speed. Suggest starting near the bottom. As he builds up speed he will decide if and when he's ready for a longer, steeper start.



+ PEDALS: Carry a spanner so you can replace the pedals quickly. Some children learn fast.



• PEDALS: Removing the pedals from the cranks allows a child to discover how to steer the bike, and not to worry about what his feet are doing.

3 ADDING PEDAL POWER

As the child gets the hang of freewheeling, suggest he rests his feet up on the cranks. If he feels happy with his feet in that position, offer to put the pedals back on. Using a slope to freewheel down, suggest that he tries to turn the pedals once or twice as the downward momentum runs out. This is the magical moment when a child first experiences the freedom of cycling.