

NO CYCLIST LEFT BEHIND

Five years ago, I decided to get back into serious bicycling after having done little of it for 30 years. I had the usual health issues of middle age—increasing weight, blood pressure, and cholesterol, and I had recently recovered from back surgery. Bicycling looked to be a good way to get some needed exercise. It involved less pounding on the knees than running and would be less of a chore than going to the gym. My wife Barbara gave me a sturdy hybrid bicycle as a 50th birthday present.

But where would I go to ride this bike? How would I learn to ride safely in traffic? What if I had a mechanical problem? If I joined a bike club, would they laugh at me? Would I get left behind by a bunch of spandex-clad racers?

Fortunately, I found a local bike club called the Five Borough Bicycle Club (5BBC) that was perfect for people like me. I started going on some of their day rides (marked in their bulletin with a happy-face symbol to indicate its appropriateness for beginning and recreational cyclists)—and my apprehensions vanished. The more I rode with the 5BBC, the more confidence, strength, and stamina I developed.

I do have one regret—all the years I spent *not* bicycling

I then began sampling the club's more strenuous rides. I've climbed Bear Mountain with the club three times and have done 100-mile ("century") rides five times. I've toured all five NYC boroughs and the surrounding countryside and have gone on club-sponsored bicycle trips to upstate New York, Massachusetts, and Vermont. I took the 5BBC's leadership training course and now lead rides for the club. I enjoy riding with a wonderful bunch of people. I do have one regret—all the years I spent *not* bicycling.

The 5BBC's motto is "New York's friendliest bike club," but I would suggest another: "No rider left behind." All club rides are led by volunteers like me who make sure that everyone finishes the ride safely. We leaders map the route, help riders check their bikes for roadworthiness, and guide the group to its destination. The club's innovative "point-drop-sweep" system helps to keep everyone together. The leader in front (the "point") shows the way and instructs riders ("drops") to stop where the route turns and to send people the right way. The leader in back (the "sweep") shepherds the tail end of the group, thanks the drops as he or she arrives, and gets them back into the ride. Everyone on the ride participates in making the day a success.

Once you start riding with the 5BBC, you can check out the other club activities. These include multi-day weekend and week-long bicycling trips; the annual Montauk Century ride from the city through the Hamptons to the ocean; monthly general meetings open to the public with fascinating topics and speakers; and classes on how to buy and maintain a bike.

But it all starts with your first ride. Surf on over to www.5bbc.org, pick a day ride this coming weekend, and experience for yourself the joy of bicycling. I promise that you won't get left behind.

Jim Zisfein, 55, is married with a 21-year-old son (who also loves to bicycle). Jim is a neurologist on staff at Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx and with a medical group in Manhattan. An Upper West Side resident since 1982, Jim joined the 5BBC in 2002. His favorite bike is a Trek 7500 hybrid that his wife gave him in 2002.