

Ride On

Bay Area Velo Girls are putting a positive spin on women's fitness. BY ERINN MORGAN

IF YOU LIVE IN CALIFORNIA'S BAY AREA and own a bicycle, the Velo Girls has something for you: 90-minute rise-and-shine rides, city rides through the undulating streets of San Francisco and casual weekend loops for riders of all ability levels. The road-cycling group, conceived almost three years ago to encourage friendship and fitness, even organizes monthly singles rides to bring together cycling-minded members of the opposite sex.

"Women like to be part of a community,

and I wanted to form something that wasn't as competitive and testosterone-driven," says Lorri Lee Lown, 38, Velo Girls' founder and cycling coach. "I announced the first ride via e-mail groups and cycling bulletin boards, and the response blew me away—46 women showed up."

Those 46 women were the start of something big: Today, more than 700 women participate in the group. They range from beginners looking to get fit to serious cyclists and racers. (Velo Girls also has a race team.) The group offers at least one organized ride

every day of the week. There are mountain-bike rides, kids' rides, training rides and even full-moon rides that end at a pub.

There also are Velo Girls cycling clinics—and they're not just for women anymore. "I've had a few e-mails in which men complained we were discriminating against them," says Lown, whose group was named the 2003 women's club of the year by USA Cycling. Now the group occasionally invites the guys to pedal along on coed rides, the singles jaunt and the recently added men's skills clinic. **H**



"I've met so many great women through the club. It's a female-bonding thing. Velo Girls helped me learn to road ride two years ago, and now I'm racing."

— Holly Roberts, 40, software engineer

>>> CYCLING 101: THE VELO GIRLS' TOP 5 TIPS

1. Choose wisely. Whether you buy new, used, inexpensive or high-end, find a bike that feels comfortable, safe and responsive.
2. Tune it up. You want a well-oiled machine, so if you're planning to ride an older bike, take it to a trusted local bike shop and get a tune-up.
3. Gear up. The right clothes (especially bike shorts), shoes, helmet and accessories will make your ride much more comfortable.
4. Work on your skills. Many clubs and coaches offer clinics where you can learn the basics, along with group riding and bike safety. Lown says the most important skills are the two things most women are afraid of—cornering and descending. "Work on your weaknesses. Confidence goes a long way on the bike; then it becomes second nature," says Lown.
5. Join the club. A local club or training group will help you commit to riding on a regular basis. Find a club that's a good fit with your goals, fitness and experience level.

You can find out about upcoming Velo Girls events at www.velogirls.com, or go to www.usacycling.org to learn about clubs in your area.