



Effective Cycling

John Forester

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The core of John Forester's concept of Effective Cycling is that bicyclists fare best when they act, and are treated in return, as drivers of vehicles, with the same rights and responsibilities that motorists have. In this new edition of his classic introductory work, Forester reasserts this idea in terms of practice and education as well as theory while also addressing--among much else--the two major forces that have shaped bicycling since the early 1980s: the proliferation of high-quality equipment and the seriously insufficient progress on the social, political, and psychological fronts. The book is filled with details, strategies, and tips that will be useful both to occasional cyclists and to those who enjoy cycling as a way of life--all drawn from the author's many years of experience as a cyclist, a Cycling Transportation Engineer, and the founder of the Effective Cycling Program.

Effective Cycling Details

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Alejandro says

Muy útil, este libro contiene todo lo que un ciclista medianamente competente debe saber: mecánica, biciactivismo y relaciones entre la literatura y el ciclismo. Sería mejor si se actualizara la edición.

Reuel says

This 1993 book is the 6th edn. Forester has been into all aspects of cycling for decades--as had his parents, uncle, and grandparents before.

The result of all that inter-generational cycling experience is a gigantic compendium of info on cycling--bikes; maintenance; safety; cycling in traffic, rain, winter, dark; clubs; racing, politics and cycling activism. Intended for novice through fairly expert cyclists (the maintenance stuff is way beyond basics). I read about half of the book, focusing on info for novices.

Shayne says

Niche textbook, with lots of information for those planning on riding their bikes with any sort of seriousness. Long, but as the author suggests, you can skip around quite a lot to read the bits that interest you while avoiding the rest. This is the sort of book that would make a good reference for the serious bike rider.

Alec Binyon says

This is a reference manual / deep study of the sport of cycling. If you are serious about your bicycle and want to ride a lot, and ride well, this book is a must. It's going to sit on the reference shelf until my legs are too old or broken to pedal. Awesome book.

Jane says

Reading an older edition, this was DATED. The chapter on love - "courting" - was particularly charming.

Content-wise, I appreciated most of the author's opinions about biking with traffic, but I think we're past the point of being militantly anti-bike lane. 'Tis the world we live in. His assumption is that ALL cyclists SHOULD aspire to be just like him: a full-time, cycling lifer. He's not living in the world of casual/part-time commuters and errand-running bikers who don't train or think particularly deeply about bikes. At all. You can say they SHOULD all you want, but they don't, so the zero-sum approach to infrastructure seems a little pipe dreamish.

Phill Melton says

Good God, where do I even start with John F'n Forester? The "stuck in the mid-80's" advice on bikes and tech—you know, advising us to drill hubs for oil lube like Campy hubs used to be, use brakes made by a company that stopped making brakes in '91, advice to racers to use bar end shifters (which, even in the 80's, they didn't), and no mention of hybrid frames, today's most popular commuter and townie platform? The unfair, misleading, uncited, and generally bad generalizations of past studies—relying on research that, when cited, is 20 or 30 years past relevance and refutation? The sexism? The clear vendetta against the League of American *Bicyclists* (it hasn't been the League of American Wheelmen since 1994, Sir) and the conspiracymongering, even comparing those he disagrees with to Stalinists? The assumptions that there is a natural progression of cyclists, from neophyte to club cyclist to tourer to racer, rather than carfree, transit oriented urban rider who never joins a club, never drafts off a wheel, and rides from necessity, not purely recreation? The assumption that governments are trying to force infrastructure on the Silent Minority of True Cyclists, when day after day grassroots organizers and advocacy organizations have to twist arms and beg to get even the most basic improvements made to key routes?

I honestly have no idea how this passed peer review.

Shayne says

Full of useful information on riding: how to ride straight, how to move smoothly with traffic, how to care for and fix your bike. Also some description of various ways to ride, from touring to racing to commuting, that is interesting and gives some ideas of how you might want to take your cycling habit forward. Took me a long time to get through, but this was a book I was glad to reread.

First Second Books says

I'm hoping this book will offer me some insights into how not to perish on the streets of NYC with my new bike, Nadia.

William Cline says

This is *the* textbook on vehicular cycling, which is best summarized in Forester's own words: "Cyclists fare best when they act and are treated as drivers of vehicles." Vehicular cycling is a set of principles and practices for riding a bicycle safely and confidently on public streets to get where you want to go. Those of us with driver's licenses learn the rules of the road, of course, but driver's education doesn't teach how apply them to riding a small, relatively slow two-wheeled vehicle.

The good news is that you don't have to read all of *Effective Cycling*'s nearly 800 pages to learn. You can skip the first 300 pages or so right off the bat. (Those would be the chapters on equipment selection and maintenance, which are pretty dated; you can just go read Lennard Zinn instead.) All you really have to read

is the roughly 170 pages of Part IV.

That's still a lot, and you'd be right to ask why you have to read 170 pages just to ride your bike to work (or wherever). Honestly, you're probably better off starting with John S. Allen's *Bicycling Street Smarts*, which is more succinct and accessible. You can come back to Forester when you feel like learning more.

Forester wrote *Effective Cycling* to be a complete, one-stop manual on cycling, so there's other information in here that you might or might not find useful, including exercise and training advice. The other important bit, though, comes in the final 140-ish pages of the book, wherein Forester discusses public policy around bicycling. Today that often manifests in advocacy of or opposition to building bike lanes and bike paths. To oversimplify, here's what Forester has to say on the subject:

1. Following the rules of the road and riding your bicycle as if you were driving any other vehicle makes bicycling practical and safe.
2. However, your average person doesn't know this and instead views bicycling as dangerous, because they're afraid they'll be hit by cars.
3. Consequently, people demand "safer streets", bicycle lanes, separated ("protected") bike paths, et cetera, thinking that riding on such things will keep them safe.
4. *But*, building such things really has more to do with satisfying various groups' political agendas ("Sure, we'll build bike paths to get those pesky bicyclists off the road," "If we can get more people to cycle, that means less air pollution," et cetera) than with benefiting cyclists per se. Moreover, a lot of bicycle facilities are crap, because they slow cyclists down and/or produce dangerous traffic conflicts at intersections. (Look around for long enough and you'll see, for instance, a bicycle lane that sends riders into the wrong side of a right-turn lane.) Creating a second tier of road facilities might get more people riding because they feel safer, but it's not clear that they'll actually *be* safer. Furthermore, those bike lanes are never going to go everywhere people want to go, and they undermine the notion that non-motorized vehicles have equal rights to our public roads.

Unfortunately, this part of Forester's book is overly verbose and sometimes pedantic. I don't mean to diminish his past work, but smug take-downs of decades-past highway committees is not a good way to win an argument. Regardless, reading Forester will help you think critically about your local transportation agency's plans or your local bicycle coalition's policy recommendations, regardless of whether you ultimately agree with him.

Unigami says

Every cyclist should read this book.

Olivia Hinthong Arends says

This book gave me the confidence to ride on the road with cars. This is a great reference for those wanting to realize their full biking potential.

Jack Lu says

It's a wonderful handbook on bike repair and cycling training. I like this writing about the feeling of cycling:

“you have the complete satisfaction of arriving because your mind has chosen the path and steered you over it; your eyes have seen it; your muscles have felt it; your breathing, circulatory, and digestive systems have all done their natural functions better than ever, and every part of your being knows you have traveled and arrived.”

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Christopher says

I acquired and digested this book at about the same time I started getting really serious about bicycle advocacy and bicycling as a lifestyle. I don't know which, if either, was the cause and which was the effect, but this book is part manifesto, part repair/maintenance manual, and all awesome.
