

INLAND: Bicycle clubs offer free repairs to spur riders



Stan Lim/The Press Enterprise

At a recent "Bike BBQ" event put on by the Redlands Bicycle Kitchen cycling group, resident Emeline Renz adjusts the seat on her bicycle while member Matt Baker holds it in place and bike mechanic Jason Reynolds, with beard, looks on. Baker and Reynolds volunteer at the BBQs.

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By DUG BEGLEY | The Press-Enterprise

Published: 07 June 2011 10:07 PM

Surrounded by the hustle and bustle of hundreds of people passing from booth to booth at Market Night in downtown Redlands, Matt Baker is getting pumped up about teaching people how to fix a flat bicycle tire.

"That's the big thing that keeps people from riding," he says, wringing his hands after tightening a set of handlebars. "They are terrified they're going to get a flat."

With a box of tools, some spare parts, and a collapsible sign with a spotlight clamped to it, Baker and others are working to bring bike maintenance basics to masses, and in turn boost the number of recreational and commuter bicyclists in the Inland area.

With bike-friendly weather, decent infrastructure in some cities and increased interest in healthier ways to travel, many think efforts to get people on two wheels will pay off, even if it's just getting a few people off the roads and onto the bike lane.

Two Inland groups -- the Redlands Bicycle Kitchen and The Bicycle Lounge at UC Riverside -- offer free repairs and advice to make people feel more comfortable cycling.

Newcomers to cycling said they appreciate the service, saying it will make them think about cycling more.

"It is kind of like going to the mechanic and having them teach you how to take care of your car," said Dominick

Torrijos, 55, of Redlands.

Easy Fix

At State and 5th streets in downtown Redlands, where the Redlands Bicycle Kitchen sets up its weekly "Bike BBQ" to help with repairs, the smell of lamb and chicken from the gyro booth next door blankets the block. David Estes, a Bike BBQ volunteer, is trying to lure people to the booth.

"People see a bike up on the rack and it is marketing," said Estes, 42.

The group gathers Thursday on State Street, from 6 to 8 p.m.

Seeking out information at the Bike BBQ is also a more friendly option, for some, than a bicycle shop, said John Gravois, one of the Bike BBQ's organizers. He said when he started cycling, he felt uncomfortable talking to experts.

"I felt kind of intimidated by a bike shop," Gravois said. "I didn't know the right words to use on parts."

He found a more user-friendly vibe at a bicycle co-op in Sacramento, where experienced people helped ease him into cycling. Now Gravois wants to do the same.

"There's a lot of people who just need a little push," he said.

Cycling options abound in the area, but even avid riders feel restricted in some places. Many of the Redlands bicyclists said they cannot commute to work by bike because they can't get to places like Moreno Valley and downtown Riverside easily.

But limits should not stop people from cycling in the area, Gravois said.

"There are opportunities to do it," he said. "It certainly isn't the weather."

Cities in the Inland area over the past decade have created hundreds of miles of bike lanes and bike paths to make cycling easier. In Fontana, Rialto and Rancho Cucamonga, officials are converting a former railroad line into a regional biking trail. Though incomplete in places, the San Ana River Trail from the San Bernardino Mountains to the Pacific Ocean is also a major cycling route.

Gaining Speed

The investments in bike-friendly streets, growing environmental consciousness and rising gas prices have convinced many to convert from cars to bikes, cyclists said, especially younger workers and students.

But as they make the transition, some cyclists don't realize they still have to maintain their bike, said Monica Galabiz, president of The Bicycle Lounge, which operates a repair service twice a week at UC Riverside. Tires and brakes need routine check-ups, as do gears, or cranks, on multi-speed bicycles.

"I'm not sure a lot of people are riding safely," Galabiz said. "A lot of people aren't riding their bikes with the right cranks."

The group operates out of a storage trailer in the parking lot of the campus recreation center off Linden Street from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Mondays and Fridays.

In addition to encouraging safer riding, bike lounge organizers help current and would-be cyclists find spare parts. The group collects donated parts, and some volunteers are using them to improve their bikes or build new ones.

"There's a whole rack of bikes we are trying to acquire (from the university)," said Alex Morris, a bike lounge volunteer.

The group, a recognized organization at the university, is working with the campus's parking and public safety officials to get the bikes, which were abandoned on campus.

University officials sell some of the bikes but could donate the others to the lounge, Galabiz said.

With so many students on tight budgets, cycling is a better choice than \$4 a gallon gas, lounge participants said.

"It's definitely something that you see getting bigger on campus," Morris said. "You have a community that can really embrace cycling for fun and for commuting."

Reach Dug Begley at 951-368-9475 or dbegley@PE.com

