

Triathlon Biking Discipline Advice

To begin I present a pre-summary of the advice on the bike needs of an aspiring triathlete and expand upon it as I go on.

This is short list of the type of bikes, gear, tools and accessories suitable for taking part in triathlons, the higher the level, the more its likely to cost.

Level	Description	Price Range
0	Any bike	Beg, borrow.....
1	Hybrid, typically an upright commuting bike.	€300 to €1,500
2	Road Bike, also call a racer, they are lighter than a hybrid, have more gears.	€500 to €1,500
3	Carbon Road Bike as level 2 but made from Carbon Fibre lighter and stiffer.	€1,200 to €20k Typically, €1,500 to €4k
4	Time Trial Bike, similar to road bike but specifically adapted for shorter run, more aerodynamic and faster.	€1,500 to €20k Typically, €1,500 to €4k

Clothing Needs: The helmet is essential, you cannot take part without one!!!!

Level	Description	Price Range
0	Helmet, track suit and shoes	€50
1	Lycra gear, padded trousers, gloves, drink bottles, tool kit pouch, light rain gear, shoes with cleats, gilets, winter clothing	€50 to €2,000 Add to your collection bit by bit.

Tools & Accessories:

Level	Description	Price Range
0	Pump, multi-tool kit, spare tubes, tyre levers, lights, oil	€25
1	Floor pump, bike stand, degreaser, washing brush and cleaners.	€75 - €500
	Bike computer, cadence sensor, power meter	€20 - €1,000
	Tri Bars	€100 - €500
	Aero Helmet	€200

Typically, road bike tyres are pumped to a pressure of 7 to 8.3 Bar (100 to 120 PSI) however you will need a floor type pump with a gauge to reach those recommended pressures. Get into the habit of checking them regularly as you are less likely to suffer punctures when they are inflated correctly.

Ideally your bike should be washed, cleaned and oiled after every ride, but us humans who can't afford a bike mechanic to it will take the lazy option and do it once or twice a month depending on your mileage and road conditions.

In the summer, you will get away with cycling in a short-sleeved shirt and shorts. Pack your phone, some light rain gear and bring food and drink or you will bonk (run out of energy and you'll will shamefully phone home.....). Drink and eat regularly or you will bonk.

In the winter time you will need to wear winter gear as it's a lot colder, overshoes help, put tinfoil around the toes, consider fitting winter tyres.

The next sections are shamelessly copied from the excellent advice given on <http://www.intelligent-triathlon-training.com/best-triathlon-bike.html> however I have changed the prices to Euro.

The best triathlon bike for you if you are just starting out in triathlon will be any one, so long as it has two wheels and brakes that work!

Even a mountain bike will do, but generally people will compete on traditional-style racing bikes with drop handlebars.

You don't have to buy an expensive bike.

You can spend anything from €200 - €20,000. The more you pay, the lighter the bike becomes due to better quality (lighter and stronger) components.

You can read reviews from fellow triathletes or let us know which you think is the best bike for triathlon by simply [filling in this form](#).

If you have any questions about your choice then please just [ask us](#).

How Much Difference Does The Cost Make?

This depends on how competitive you are. Generally the more expensive the bike, the lighter it is. If you're happy just to get round a race then the weight really doesn't matter – it will still do the job. If you're serious about improving times then a lighter bike will help.



The difference between a heavy, inexpensive bike and a light, more expensive bike is noticeable. It's a bit like driving a luxury car compared to a cheap one.

You don't need to pay more money if you are particularly tall or short. You can make any bike fit you.

A more expensive one will last longer because of the higher quality components. This becomes more relevant the more you plan to ride your bike. Even a cheaper one will last a long time if you look after it and don't ride it for hours every day!

How to Choose A Bike

The ideal way to choose the best triathlon bike is to go to a reputable bike shop and get advice.

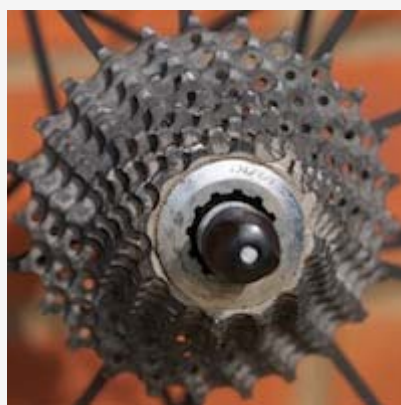
Notes: *Good local bikes shop in Kerry include O'Halloran Cycles, Halfords, O'Sullivan's (Killarney), Caballs and Tralee Gas Supplies.*

The sort of questions they should be asking you, or information you should be giving them are:

- What are you wanting to **do** on your bike (ie race fast vs complete course, race Ironman vs sprint triathlons)
- What **distances** will you cover
- How much **training** do you plan to do
- What **type of riding** will you do – hilly or flat
- What is your **budget**
- Do you have any **back problems** (this might restrict your mobility and therefore a smaller/shorter bike would suit you better so that you are more upright).

Our general advice is to buy at the upper end of your budget and get the best triathlon bike you can afford, because you will notice the difference in quality.

Gears



Most modern bikes will have at least 18 gears. Many will have 20 – 30.

If most of your riding is going to be on the flat then you don't need to worry too much about the number of gears.

If you are very experienced and well trained then you don't need a lot of gears. This is because the extra ones are usually lower gears which you probably won't make use of.

If you are going to be doing a lot of hilly rides or you are particularly unfit, then you will want more gears. This is because they will give you lower ratios which will make the hills easier.

'What's a ratio?' I hear you ask....

The gear that your bike is in at any one time is determined by the interaction between the front and rear cogs, which is called the ratio. The more cogs (also called sprockets) that your bike has, the more gears it has.

So if you hear someone saying they rode in 53 x 13, then they mean that the chain was on the front cog with 53 teeth and the back cog with 13 teeth.

A high ratio gear is 53 x 13, whilst a low ratio gear is 34 x 25. The closer the ratio is to 1:1 the easier it is to ride, but the faster you have to pedal to move.

Carbon Frame or Aluminium?

Whereas carbon fibre frames used to be reserved for the elite cyclist, nowadays there are a lot of carbon fibre frame sets around.

So what's the best triathlon bike frame to go for?

Carbon fibre is generally lighter, but cheaper carbons offer no advantage over a similarly priced aluminium frame and may even be heavier.

What you choose comes down to personal preference: do you like the look, and does it fit well are more important than whether the frame is carbon or aluminium.

Generally we would advise you go for an aluminium if you are going for the cheaper end of the price range. This is because when a carbon frame gets damaged it is harder to spot because the damage is often internal. Also, if they fail they tend to fail spectacularly. If an aluminium frame gets damaged it is usually easy to spot.

Bars

Another thing to consider is **aero bars**, also known as **tri bars**. These are add-ons to conventional bars that enable you to get into a more aerodynamic position. Some people find riding more comfortable with them. Again it is really a matter of personal preference and whether saving a little bit of time through aerodynamics is important to you or not.

There is a plethora of different brands to choose from. They all do essentially the same job and different designs will suit different people. So it's worth trying a few different ones to see what suits you best - there is no one best triathlon bike aerobar.

Generally you would get your bike set up without aerobars. You want the bike to fit so that you can control it effectively before adding extras.

Saddles

Saddles are a bit of a lottery. You should always try them before buying one. They come in different shapes and sizes and some come with holes in them or gel. Gel or holes won't make much difference to comfort if the shape of the saddle doesn't fit you.

Don't fall into the trap of thinking the wider the saddle the better. The best triathlon bike saddle is the one that you find comfortable!

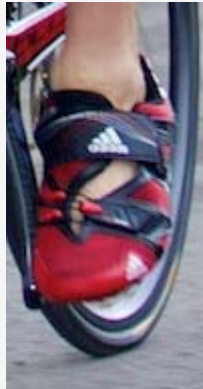
Saddles that suit females tend to be shorter and wider.

Having a decent pair of cycling shorts makes all the difference to your comfort on the bike. If you are new to cycling then all saddles will probably feel uncomfortable at first but so long as you haven't chosen a saddle that is the wrong fit you will get used to it – eventually!

Pedals and Shoes

The best triathlon bike shoes are ones that you clip into pedals. You really do need to get cycling shoes and clipless pedals – in other words ones that you clip your shoes into.

Even if you are riding an old mountain bike get some proper pedals and shoes. They give you much more control and more efficient transfer of power to the bike. They will also be more comfortable.



These pedals are spring-loaded (a bit like a ski-binding) and attach to the cleat on your cycling shoe.

Cycling shoes are very stiff soled – the stiffer the better. This is so that you don't lose power or feel the pedal through the shoe.

There is a wide variety of shoes and pedals available. So again, just try as many different ones as you can to find the ones that suit you best. Some of the most popular brands to consider are Look, Shimano and Speed Play.

They are all similar, just slightly different takes on the same theme. Some offer more vertical and lateral movement so you are not locked so rigidly in place. This allows your joints to move a little and choose the most natural position for your lower legs.

Cycling shoes should feel pretty snug. They shouldn't be restrictive and squash your toes but your feet shouldn't move in the shoe. You should go for the same size as your normal shoes but they will feel like a snugger fit.

Whilst training you will probably wear socks, but you are more likely to race without socks. So try your shoes with thin cycling socks, definitely not running socks.

Wheels

You could easily spend more on wheels than the rest of the bike in total. Once you have a bike that fits, the thing that will make the biggest difference to your performance is the wheels.

If you want to spend money on something, then spend it on the best triathlon bike wheels and tyres you can afford, rather than an expensive carbon fibre seat post or static components.

Losing rotating mass (weight) on a bike makes a significant difference to performance. So anywhere you can lose weight of things that rotate (so mainly the wheels, but also the chain set) the better or faster you will go.

If you want your wheels to be multi-purpose – in other words you are going to use them every day and are going to be doing a variety of riding, both hilly and flat then you don't want anything too deep section (depth of the rim).

This is because the wind affects the wheels if they have deep rims, and they are also generally heavier, although expensive ones can still be light.



We would generally recommend aluminium wheels unless you have a lot of money to spend. Carbon wheels are expensive, and GOOD carbon wheels are VERY expensive.

Carbon wheels are also less reliable. They are more prone to fractures and control is less predictable in the wet than aluminium wheels.

If you just want a good set of racing wheels and can afford it then go for carbon ones.

So the bottom line is, spend as much as you can to get the best triathlon bike wheels!

Tyres

Good quality tyres are a worthwhile investment. Better quality material gives you longer lasting tyres that are more puncture resistant and lighter than lower quality tyres.

A wheel is designed to have either **clincher or tubular** ('tubs') tyres. You can't change from clincher to tubs without changing the wheel. It is possible to change the rim of the wheel to enable you to change tyres but this is complicated and if you want to do this speak to a bike shop!

Clinchers are the most conventional tyres. They have a bead that hooks onto the rim of the wheel, with an inner tube inside.

Tubulars has an inner tube that is sewn into the tyre and then glued to the rim of the wheel. So you don't have a separate inner tube and tyre.

Once upon a time tubs were faster because they were lighter and better quality than clinchers. However advances in clinchers over the last 10 years means that there is now no real difference between the two types.

Clinchers tend to be the best triathlon bike tyres for most people as they are convenient. If you have top-end carbon wheels then tubs are better because the way the rims of the wheels are constructed means that the wheel can be lighter and stronger.

As with other bike parts, there are lots of different brands of both clinchers and tubs. Generally the more you pay the better the tyres are for their purpose.

If you only buy one set then don't get the lightest or the heaviest, choose something in the middle. This means you get the best for performance in terms of puncture resistance, weight, grip and rolling resistance.

Crash Hats/Helmets

If you are going to race in an officially sanctioned race then you will need to wear an approved crash hat. There are three standardizing organizations that approve crash hats:

- [ASTM](#)
- [BS](#)
- [Snell](#)

A crash hat should fit well and not move on your head. Most good helmets will have a webbing that fits around the back of your head and can be adjusted.

If this is well set up and the helmet size is correct, you should be able to shake your head with the chin straps un-done and the helmet will not move about or fall off.

If it moves, you either need to adjust the straps or change sizes.

The more expensive the helmet, the lighter it is and the more venting holes it has. The increased cost is due to more internal mesh being required to make sure the helmet conforms to safety standards.

The more you pay, the less you get!

Best Triathlon Bike Sizing



Triathlon Bike Sizing

Something else to consider when choosing your best triathlon bike is the size, and then you need to get it set up so that it fits you properly, is comfortable to ride and easy to control.

Choosing Your Best Triathlon Bike Summary

- The best triathlon bike for you will depend on what you want to get from it, how often you are going to ride it and what sort of riding you will be doing.
- When choosing a bike the most relevant factor will probably be your budget. The more you spend the lighter it will be. Spending money on wheels and tyres will have the biggest impact on performance.
- At the end of the day the best triathlon bike for you is one that is the best combination of comfort, performance and price.