



MOUNTAIN BIKING FOR BEGINNERS: SHREDDING AT ANY AGE

Flying along the Top Shelf trail, my mountain bike was not completely earthbound as I rode the dirt-packed roller coaster up and then quickly down the banks and quick turns. I felt super powerful as I whipped through the tree-lined descent on the Whiskey Trail Runs outside of Bandon, Oregon. I then knew I was hooked on mountain biking. Or I should say, hooked again. After two decades away from trail riding, I was back, and pumped for more. What I hadn't realized until after my first day being back in the saddle is that mountain biking is a perfect catalyst for female empowerment.

Things have changed in the world of mountain biking since I hung up my beloved early 1990s hardtail (bike-speak for a bike without shocks). I love mountain biking, but found it easier to sneak road bike rides in between all the demands of my busy life. Road rides could start from right outside my door, and I'd found the extra step of driving to a trailhead to go for a mountain

the trails. It turns out that riding a mountain bike is just like, well, riding a bike. My body remembered the thrill of zipping along a single-track trail as soon as my tires pointed down.

Both brand-new riders and returning riders like me are well served to take a lesson. Mountain bike coaching is becoming increasingly popular as the sport continues to grow and be more inclusive of women. Lindsay Ritcher started Ladies All Ride in Bend, Oregon and holds women-only mountain bike coaching clinics all over the country. "It's really important for women over 40 to take a lesson so they aren't scared on the bike," she says. "As women, we often focus on the negative feelings of aging and mountain biking helps us feel more fit and strong."

By taking a lesson, new riders can figure out what type of riding suits them. Maybe you love screaming descents and need to find trails that include a ride to the top, either by shuttle or chair lift, or maybe you are just in amazing shape to ride up the steep inclines. Maybe you like more flowy, smooth trails, or love roller-coaster ups and downs, like me. Having a coach guide the rides takes the stress out of figuring out the trail system so new riders can focus on the technical aspects of learning how to navigate a new sport.

The addictive power of challenging myself up the thigh-burning climbs and the thrill of sailing back down the mountain adds to the overall mountain biking mystique. More than anything, mountain biking reminds me of how fearless I felt when I was younger and helps me feel strong and powerful now. Lindsay spoke candidly about her personal empowerment journey through the sport of mountain biking. "I mountain bike because it's hard and scary and intimidating. The bike has taught me how to take control of my life and I think it's a great tool to help women learn how to do hard things."

TIP

To get started mountain biking, the first thing you will need is the bike itself. Lindsay suggests riding lots of different types of bikes, and not just a 10-minute ride around the block of your neighborhood bike shop. Many shops will offer free demos, or you can rent a bike (often the rental fee will be subtracted from the purchase price if you buy it). Women have really different needs when it comes to cycling and it will take an investment of time to figure out what is the right fit and type of bike for you.

