

POSH PEDALS

THE ULTIMATE BUYER'S GUIDE

Pedals are all the same, right? Wrong! Choosing them can be a tricky business. Luckily, *BikesEtc* has consulted a bona fide expert so you don't put a foot wrong



Mechanically attaching your feet to a bicycle has many benefits, but how do you choose the pedals that fix you to yours? Going with the first thing the shop assistant suggests or picking the ones that are half price on Wiggle might not be the best criteria. We've rounded up clipless pedals (so-called because they do away with traditional toeclips) from the leading makers and tried them for ourselves. We've also enlisted the help of pedal expert Spencer Wilson (below) to explain what we should be looking for, along with the pros and cons of each system.



In our quest for the perfect pedal, we canvassed the views of a qualified bike fitter for the low-down on what to look for in a pedal.

SPENCER WILSON IS AN EXPERT BIKE FITTER AT PERSONALBIKEFIT.COM

'No single feature, be it weight, rotational movement, float, or whatever else makes a pedal the "best",' says Wilson. 'At Personal Bikefit, the most important factor for us to understand is how the pedal interacts with the shoe, and therefore the wearer, while riding. Does it provide a degree of guidance for your foot so that the union between shoe and pedal is secure? Or, is there a lack of guidance allowing the foot to move too freely? At the same time, you don't want your foot excessively fixed – a frequent problem that was found with early clipless pedals – as in some cases, this can result in knee injuries.'

'Rider biomechanics are also a crucial factor when it comes to picking a pedal. So, for example, weak glutes can force riders to drive forces across the top of the pedal instead of pushing downward and evenly onto the pedal platform. It's no good having a large pedal/shoe interface if the forces are not being applied to it evenly. If the loading forces aren't in line with the pedal spindle, for example, or your knees aren't able to track in a vertically straight line, then no kind of pedal – no matter how well-made it is – will be able to correct this.' ➔

What to look out for

Platform size

The bigger the pedal surface area, or platform, the better the relationship between the cleat and the pedal will be. This helps keep the pedal as comfortable during the fifth hour of a ride as it is during the first, while also providing the most efficient power transfer.

Q factor adjustment

The Q factor is the distance between the centreline of the pedals, laterally. Not all pelvic widths are the same! To produce maximum power, the knee needs to track in a vertical line as this is both most efficient and reduces the risk of knee pain. Look for cleats with good lateral adjustment or, even better, use pedals that are available with different axle lengths.

Float

A cleat and pedal system with a zero-degree or 'fixed' float will lock your feet rigidly in place. However, most riders will prefer to have a little wiggle room. Measured in degrees, float is the amount that your heel can move side-to-side before disengaging from the pedal. Most manufacturers sell different cleats with different amounts of float, while Speedplay cleats can be carefully adjusted to tailor their degree of movement.

Release tension

A special consideration for riders new to using clipless pedals and who need easy engagement and disengagement. More experienced riders, especially those who like to

mash the pedals when sprinting, frequently prefer the security offered by a stiffer release tension. Many high-end pedals now use a carbon spar instead of the traditional steel spring to provide tension. This saves weight, but means that the effort needed to clip out cannot be adjusted. Pedals which possess a good range of spring tension can be adjusted for novice and elite riders alike.

A good range and adjustment of rotation

Riders with biomechanical imbalances and lower-limb issues may need a more precise set-up and require more rotation. Speedplay pedals are the perfect choice for this, allowing 15° of rotation right down to zero. Time pedals also allow a large degree of float. This not only protects your knees against potential damage, but means there's less chance of you accidentally unclipping.

Reliability

This is a sometimes forgotten factor in pedal choice. In order to slim down their pedals, manufacturers use smaller and smaller bearings and bushes. While these can be replaced fairly cheaply, doing so can be tricky and time consuming. For our money, you can't beat Shimano for durability.

Stack height

The height from the pedal axle to the sole of the foot. If you choose pedals with a high stack height, you may also need to raise your saddle height in order to compensate.

'Riders with lower-limb issues may need extra rotation and a more precise set-up'