

Seniors on Trikes!

Rubber-Hits-the-Road Recommendations

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Author of [Traveling at the Speed of Bike](#)



Seniors sign up for adult tricycle classes for lots of reasons. Here are some real-world examples from the Silver Spokes class I was hired to teach in the City of Decatur, GA (a Bronze-level Bike Friendly Community):

**An octogenarian who could no longer drive a car pointed to a hill, and said, “My goal is to be able to go up that hill because I intend to buy my own tricycle to go grocery shopping and there is a hill I must be able to climb”;*

**A woman in her 70s shared that she couldn’t wait for her neighbors to see her riding a trike down their block, and that she was highly motivated to buy her own trike after her hip surgery and recovery the following month;*

**A man in his 70s who loved to ride his bike was experiencing early symptoms of Parkinson’s Disease and was no longer comfortable on two wheels;*

**A woman in her 60s who grew up in another country, where she participated in many sports, said she never learned to ride a bike there and wanted to learn now;*

**A woman in a wheelchair wanted the feeling of freedom that riding a bike gives you;*

**A man in his 50s told us he had just been diagnosed with diabetes and wanted to use diet and exercise to avoid having to use medication. His partner had never ridden a bike before but wanted to keep him company during the classes;*

**A man and woman in their 50s said it had been a long time since they had ridden and they hoped to use bikeshares together when they traveled but wanted to start with trikes first.*

You may want to consider offering this empowering, transformative, and fun course to seniors in your city as well. Here are details to get you going on a grant or other funding request:

Who: Men and women over the age of 50;

What: Trikes skills class, using League of American Bicyclists' Smart Cycling Skills (all skills are transferable to two-wheels as well);

Where: Local recreation center, park, or other easily-accessible space with direct access to a multiuse trail/path;

When: Each course is weekly for four weeks for 1.5 hours each class;

Why: Fun, fitness, empowerment, socialization, mental health, community connections;

How: Local/state grant or corporate sponsor funds the purchase of trikes/helmets and hourly payment of League Cycling Instructors; students pay nominal charge (i.e. \$20 per 4-week course) to reinforce commitment and secure their space;

of Trikes: maximum of two students to share each trike (recommend 3-4 trikes for students plus a trike for each instructor);

of Helmets: one helmet for each student (they really don't like to share these as they are hard to keep readjusting and, let's face it, sweaty helmets are gross to share);

of Instructors: one instructor for every three students -- find certified League Cycling Instructors near you [here](#);

Plus: a supply of League of American Bicyclists Smart Cycling booklets and any other pertinent handouts your city or state bike advocacy organizations may have available.



Recommended Curriculum

1. Intro/ABC Quick Check/Stretches (15 minutes)
2. Instruction (30 minutes)
 - (Week 1) Handling Skills, Trail/Infrastructure Etiquette
 - (Week 2) Hazard Avoidance Techniques
 - (Week 3) Scanning, Signals, Intersections
 - (Week 4) Rules of the Road
3. Group Ride on Trail (25 minutes)/On-road ride possible on week 4
4. Student Choice: Open Ride on Trail/Additional Skills Practice/Q & A (20 minutes)



Additional Tips

Remind your instructors to have students sign a League of American Bicyclists release form, and any other forms (such as medical releases) your organization may require.

Ask students for any physical limitations or issues they may have. During stretches, you can confirm that students can turn their heads and bodies. Determine adaptations for any limitations.

Chat with students about their history with bike riding and if they have any specific concerns. A surprising number of people had a bad fall (perhaps long ago as a child) and this still weighs on their mind. It seems to be helpful for them to verbalize it and for them to know you understand.

Check that all students can firmly grasp the handlebar grips and activate the brakes. Some seniors suffer from arthritis and may find this challenging. You will want to know this so you can avoid hills and make any other needed adaptations, or suggest that the student skip this class. You may want to purchase at least one trike with coaster brakes.

Advise all students to carry water and encourage frequent sips, especially on hot days. Some seniors have incontinence issues and are hesitant to drink needed liquids so making sure they know where the closest bathroom is can be comforting.

Pay special attention to when students stand up after riding awhile as they may become light-headed. Make sure there is a shady spot with a bench nearby in case this happens, and for when students are waiting for their turns if they are sharing trikes.

Stick to moderate time limits and goals, even if the class seems to be going well, because your students may have a varied level of physical fitness or may become suddenly fatigued. When in doubt, do less. Don't rush. Have fun. Chat. Laugh. Connect.



Offer to take photos of students and send them to them. They love to share them with their grandchildren!

If I can help you in any other way, please let me know. You can connect with me [here](#).

Special thanks to Tracie Sanchez, formerly of the City of Decatur's Active Living Department, for envisioning this class and bringing it to fruition through a state parks and recreation innovation mini-grant. Also thanks to the rest of the folks at Decatur Active Living, and to my co-teacher, Niklas Vollmer. See additional stories about seniors on trikes, and much more, in [my book](#). If interested, you can follow my blog [here](#).

Disclaimer: I am not liable for anything that may happen as a result of sharing my lived experience with you. Please make your own decisions and use your own good judgment.