

PEDDLING A NEW LOOK FOR COMMUTER CYCLISTS

More bikes are used for transportation rather than recreation

Arthur Orsini doesn't fit the usual stereotype of a cyclist who commutes to work on a bike.



KIM STALLKNECHT Arthur Orsini bikes about six kilometres from home to work, taking it slow and steady in his work clothes, so he doesn't need to shower when he gets to work.

Instead of a Gore-Tex jacket and Lycra bike shorts, he wears a suit jacket, a tie, long pants and shoes.

He dresses in work clothes to remind himself not to cycle too fast. By cycling slow but steady, he doesn't have to change clothes or take a shower before he's ready to start work.

In addition to its practical benefits, riding in his work clothes also has a social purpose for Orsini: he believes it helps to change the image of the typical cyclist.

"I never felt like I was that kind of speedster cyclist," said Orsini who moved to the West Coast from Ontario 25 years ago.

"When I first came to Vancouver, I didn't see myself within the cycling movement — I just thought: 'I'm a person who rides my bike.'"

Cyclists such as Orsini are part of a big change taking place in cycling in Vancouver. Rather than wearing special cycling clothes, people are opting to wear regular clothing when they're riding their bike to work, shop or run errands. And that's happening because of the expanded network of protected bike lanes in Vancouver,

say cycling advocates. The change in the look of cyclists is one that Paul Bogaert, owner of the Bike Doctor, has witnessed firsthand.

“There are people who come into the shop who are going to work and treat it as a training ride,” he said.

“For a lot of people, they don’t want to look like that. They don’t identify as a cyclist. They just don’t want to buy all that gear. They’re happy just to jump on their bike and go.”

The change to stylish urban cyclists is reflected in bike sales at Bike Doctor. The store used to sell mountain bikes, road racing bikes and hybrid bikes but has stopped selling mountain bikes designed for using on off-road trails.

“I would say that 80 per cent of our sales are the commuter type of hybrid bicycle,” Bogaert said.

The Bike Doctor sells road racing bikes for people interested in specific rides such as the GranFondo or bike touring. But Bogaert believes commuter bikes will continue to be a big part of his company’s business.

“I see more and more people commuting by bike,” he said. “It’s changed dramatically in the last 10 to 15 years — and it is accelerating. As more people do it, the streets become safer for bikes.” ← However, injuries and deaths are still likely to increase. - cjk

Paul Dragan, owner of Reckless Bike Stores in Vancouver, said his three stores focus on selling bikes as an “urban transportation solution.

“We shifted long ago from performance products to recreational and now what you would call utilitarian,” he said.

“No one is making a living selling high-end bikes. They’re selling those bikes in conjunction with lower-priced bikes.”

Dragan said the “bread and butter market” for Reckless are bikes from \$500 to \$1,500 with the emphasis on bikes in the \$500 to \$1,000 range. High-end road bikes start at \$1,500 and go above \$10,000.

He said his core market are 20to 30-year-olds who don’t own a car and want to ride to work within the city of Vancouver from, for example, Kitsilano to Gastown. He doesn’t sell to the long-distance commuter riding from Burnaby to downtown.

“The biggest factor for the change — other than the millennial age group — is the growth in cycling friendly transportation options,” Dragan said.

“We’ve always had the Seawall and that’s been great. The person who would have ridden their bike 20 years ago around the Seawall and said, ‘That’s it, I’m not going into traffic, it’s too dangerous,’ has changed. Now that same person has an option of going across the Burrard Bridge or along Cornwall and it’s really pleasant. That urban infrastructure is crucial to making cycling more approachable and more convenient for the average person.”

Now located on West Broadway, the Bike Doctor opened 25 years ago this year in its original location close to the Adanac Bike Route.

When the Adanac route opened as the city’s first a year later, Bogaert remembers how few cyclists used it. Now, there are hundreds and hundreds of cyclists using the route daily.

In the last few years, the number of trips by bike have increased dramatically. According to the City of Vancouver, total cycling trips (excluding recreational) have increased from 99,100 in 2014 to 131,025 in 2015 — an increase of 32 per cent.

Bogaert has seen bike routes develop and expand into a grid criss-crossing the city that people can use to safely get to where they want to go.

Bogaert said more bike routes, along with education and promotion, has encouraged a more diverse group of people to ride.

One of the big factors he cites is the attention given to cycling during events such as Bike to Work Week which started Monday and continues to Sunday, June 5.

Orsini's commute by bike is about six kilometres from Commercial Drive to the VGH Cycling Centre on West 10th where he is the active transportation facilitator for Vancouver Coastal Health.

At the cycling centre, Orsini says there are also cyclists who spend as much as 45 minutes on their commute to work. Cyclists with longer commutes are much more likely to have a fast bike and wear stretchy pants.

“Then there’s the other element I’m more a part of,” he said. “Once they locked up their bike, they don’t have that look of being a cyclist.”