

## *Getting comfortable: how to make your bike fit and feel better*

**BY GIANA ROBERGE**

1. Establish a relationship with a bike shop or coach that provides fitting services:
  - ▶ If you presently feel any discomfort, compile a list beforehand describing where it is.
  - ▶ Be honest with the shop employee about your riding time, fitness, and commitment to stretching.
  - ▶ Expect to pay for the expertise you receive.
2. Saddle height, fore-aft position, and tilt, as well as stem height, top tube/stem length, handlebar width/drop and shape, and cleat position all affect how comfortable a bike feels. A bike shop employee or coach, trained to fit cyclists, can help you find the correct specifications for all of these.
3. Saddle comfort is dependent on the size, cushioning material, and shape of the saddle, as well as the construction and fit of your shorts.
  - ▶ See if you can try a few different saddles before you purchase one.
  - ▶ Softer saddles are not necessarily more comfortable, since they hinder the ability to slide and make subtle but significant positional changes on the saddle; sitting in one place for more than 10 minutes can cause discomfort.
  - ▶ Similarly, narrow saddles tend to work better than the wider saddles, since they allow you to move around, giving many different positions.
  - ▶ A longer-nosed saddle allows you to move forward to generate more short-term power, and then back when climbing.
  - ▶ Leather saddles, such as those used by the majority of professional women cyclists, may be more comfortable for you. Consider an Era saddle made by Selle San Marco.
  - ▶ Your shorts should be form-fitting with an antibacterial chamois. Louis Garneau has done extensive testing with the Saturn Cycling Team women's team to make the best shorts possible.
  - ▶ The shorts material should allow for moisture wicking.
  - ▶ Shorts should be replaced frequently, as the chamois will wear out.
  - ▶ For women riders, the chamois should not have a middle seam.
4. There are three main hand positions on a road bike: on the tops of the bars, on the brake lever hoods, and in the drops. Each position should allow you to have a relaxed arm with a slight bend at the elbow.
  - ▶ You should be able to reach the brake levers comfortably. Small hands may require the use of mountain bike brake levers, which can be done at your local bike shop.
  - ▶ Pain between your shoulder blades can be a tell-tale sign of a stem that is too long, while a stem that is too short can be a literal pain in the neck.
5. These hand positions lead to three distinct postures:
  - ▶ The tops of the bars are for riding alone, when you don't need to get to the brakes quickly. This position is also good for climbing, as it makes for an open-hip angle, encouraging the use of the hamstrings (slow-twitch muscles that are most suited for extended efforts).
  - ▶ Riding "on the hoods" is a little more aerodynamic. It allows a safe position for cornering as well as group riding that is a little more stretched out, but still comfortable. The quadriceps are recruited slightly more than on the tops of the bars, making this a better position when speed is required.

- ▶ The drop position (see photo below) is the most aerodynamic. The hip angle is the most acute (closed), making this the least comfortable of the three positions. It allows even heavier recruitment of the quads and is therefore appropriate for sprinting and fast cornering, as well as solo breakaways and time trialing (racing against the clock).
6. Comfortable grips or quality handlebar tape, such as that made by Profile, can be crucial to comfort of the hands, as can a pair of high-quality gloves. Make sure you relax your grip frequently.
  7. Know and record your measurements, including saddle height, saddle set-back, stem height, and bar angle. Check them frequently to make sure they have not changed with use – parts can slip as bolts loosen slightly over time. Additionally, a new saddle or pair of shoes can make significant changes in saddle height and set-back necessary.
  8. Stretch at least three times weekly, preferably after riding. Stretching increases the range of motion by lengthening muscles, which may help increase blood flow, reduce the risk of injury, and can make you a more comfortable, faster cyclist.
  9. Consider using pedals with “float,” which allows forefoot rotation (which most riders have), thereby helping to reduce knee strain and soreness.
  10. Read books, magazines and ask your favorite bike shop employee about any problems you may have. Chances are, they are not unique to you and the answer may be as simple as raising your saddle.



**Giana Roberge** was a professional cyclist with over 30 career victories when a heart condition forced her to retire in 1999. Shortly after this, she was named Coach and Manager of the Timex Women’s Professional Cycling Team, then was soon promoted to Assistant General Manager for the Saturn Professional Cycling Team, and Coach of the Saturn Women’s Team. Under her leadership, the Saturn Women’s team became the top-ranked team both in the United States and the world.

When the Saturn cycling program disbanded in late 2003, Giana founded [Team Speed Queen](#), whose mission is to educate people about cycling and promote the sport to women at all levels. Also at this time, she also founded the nationwide Women’s Task Force on Cycling, which develops programs to promote women’s bike racing throughout the United States. See <http://womencyclists.com> for more.

In 2003, Giana’s heart condition was resolved, and she made a return to racing by winning the U. S. Cycling Federation National Time Trial Championship for women 30-34, as well as a silver medal in the same event at the U.C.I. World Masters Championships. In 2004, she moved up to the top spot on the podium, becoming the Women’s World Masters Time Trial Champion.

Prior to joining the managerial side of cycling, Giana owned Paradox Bicycle Center in Saratoga Springs, NY.

Giana’s knowledge, broad experience, and accessibility make her an outstanding coach, and she is an excellent public speaker as well, blending the inherent themes of speed, teamwork and determination in both cycling and business together for intriguing talks to corporations, clubs, and women’s groups.