Just Along for the Ride

Top 10 Accessories for Smart Florida Cyclists

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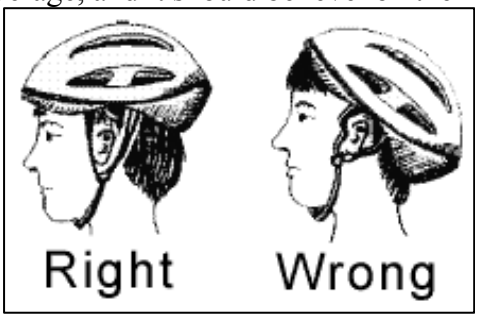
Cycling, like many sports, can become equipment-centric. While there is a never-ending variety of accessories for your bike, you don't need a host of fancy gear to get started. These are the top ten accessories you should consider for a safe and comfortable ride in Florida.

#1 Helmet

Wise cyclists wear a helmet every time they ride. Why? According to the ***Bicycle Helmet Safety Institute (BHSI)***, wearing a properly-fitted ***Consumer Product Safety Commission*** (CPSC)-certified helmet can reduce the risk of head injury by 85 percent and severe brain injury by 88 percent. Look for a CPSC sticker inside the helmet. A low-cost helmet meets the same safety standards as a pricey, high-end helmet, so save your money. Helmet air vents keep you cooler. A bright colored helmet increases your visibility to other road users and reflects more sunlight, which also keeps you cooler.

For a proper fit, the helmet should comfortably touch the head all the way around, and be level and stable enough to resist even violent shakes or hard blows while staying in place. The helmet should be as low on the head as possible to maximize side coverage, and it should be level on the head with the strap comfortably snug.



Always replace the helmet after a fall if you hit your head; and given Florida weather conditions, after 5 years. The date of manufacture is listed on the inside label. The ***BHSI*** website covers all aspects of bike helmets, including how to fit them and their effectiveness.

Keep your friends, family and your brain happy—don't ride without a helmet.

#2 Nutrients

If you ride more than an hour under the hot Florida sun, you'll require hydration and nutrients to keep the pedals turning. Plan your rest stops where you can replenish your water supply—and empty your bladder.

Even on cool days and short rides you need to keep drinking fluids as you ride. Proper hydration will make every ride more comfortable and allow for quicker recovery. A basic guideline is to drink about 20 ounces of water for every hour that you ride. If you want a more accurate estimate of needed liquid for your height, weight and exercise level, check out the "water calculator" at ***camelbak.com.*** Water bottle holders can be attached to your bicycle frame, handlebars or behind your seat. Some riders find using a water bottle very difficult or impossible, requiring them to stop to get a drink. This can be annoying to others in a group. Using a water bottle can also be a safety hazard if it means taking your eyes off the road. An alternative to a water bottle is a ***Camelbak*** backpack which can hold 1.5-3.0 liters of fluid accessed through a flexible straw that hangs in front of your face. This system promotes better hydration as you can take sips whenever needed. The liquid in the backpack also insulates you from the sun and helps keep you cool.

Make timing your fluid replacement a priority. Take a drink after the first 30 minutes and at least every 15 minutes thereafter. Even better, take a drink any time you can. Don't wait until you are thirsty to drink. Dehydration can be very unhealthy and it should be monitored on long rides, especially in hot weather. Monitor your urine color and volume at all rest stops with facilities. Dark urine or no urine output is a sure sign of dehydration.

Sports drinks and water supplements also provide hydration, and more. Depending on the specific product, they may provide sodium, sugars, electrolytes and carbohydrates to replenish those used up or excreted. They increase your energy and endurance and hasten the post-ride recovery.

Depending on your age, weight and exertion level, you burn 30-50 grams of carbohydrates per hour of cycling so you should take in 7-10 grams every 15 minutes after the first 45 minutes of riding. Don't fall into the "I'll eat at the next intersection/hilltop/turn" trap, or you risk a demoralizing low-blood-sugar ride-stopping "bonk," a feeling of light-headedness and weakness in all limbs. This is similar to "the wall" in running.
Consume primarily natural, simple, high-carbohydrate foods. Gels, goos, and chews are easy to carry and, as a bonus, often contain electrolytes. Nutrition bars, bananas, nuts and granola are also good sources for quick energy replacement.

#3 Eye Protection

Eye protection is an important addition to safety. Tinted and/or polarized eyewear protects your eyes from the sun, improves your vision and protects you from all things inhabiting the road and air that love to go right for the eyes. Put a good barrier between your eyes and any road debris that might pop up: wind-borne dust, insects, tree branches, pollen, rain and whatever else the wind is blowing your way.

Sunglasses protect your eyes from ultraviolet radiation (UVR) and reduce the risk of cataracts. They also protect the tender skin around your eyes from sun exposure. Sunglasses that block both UVA and UVB rays offer the best protection. Wraparound sunglasses also block UV rays from sneaking in from the sides. Goggles (clear or prescription) provide even better protection and the strap will keep them on your head. You may also want eyeware with clear or photo-sensitive lenses for cloudy or rainy days and night riding.

#4 Rear-view Mirror

A rear-view mirror is a must for safe riding. Cars require rear-view mirrors and you should have one for the same reasons. You can check behind you for vehicles or other riders before moving into a traffic lane or passing

other riders or vehicles. Without a rear-view mirror you would have to turn your head 90-180 degrees to make sure the road is clear, and that maneuver may cause you to veer off your intended path and crash. You can purchase mirrors that attach to handlebars, helmets, eyeglass frames, various parts of your bike, and even your forearm.

5 Attention-Getters

Florida law requires a front white light and a rear red light when riding at night, for obvious reasons. However, using these lights during the day is just as beneficial to your safety, especially if they flash. Emergency vehicles have flashing lights so drivers will more easily recognize their approach. Safe, wise cyclists have flashing lights for the same reason.

You may unexpectedly find yourself riding in dark conditions other than nighttime, such as in a rainstorm, fog or in dark shadows. Flashing lights will help motorists see you. There are lights that attach to your helmet (some helmets come with a light), your clothes and various parts of your bike. The less expensive ones use dry-cell batteries; more expensive ones are rechargeable and often use very bright LEDs.

Other attention-getters are bells, horns and buzzers. All are very useful for warning pedestrians and other cyclists of your presence. A bell is required when riding anywhere on Longboat Key. Many recumbent riders attach a flag on a short pole to alert drivers of their presence. Wearing bright colors also increases visibility, and is even more important when riding alone.

#6 Protection from the Sun

Skin cancer, including the most deadly form, melanoma, has been on the rise in Florida and the US. The three primary risk factors for skin cancer are sunburns, exposure to ultraviolet radiation (UVR) from the sun and being a non-Hispanic white. It is estimated that 1 in 5 Americans will get skin cancer. Clothing is our first line of defense against UVR and protects us by absorbing or blocking much of this radiation. The more skin you cover, the better.

Fabrics differ in their ability to filter UVR and are given Ultraviolet Protection Factor (UPF) ratings, the higher the better for sun protection. Bleached cotton and loose-weave clothing have very low UPFs; unbleached cotton (less common in clothes), polyester, Lycra, tight-weave and specialty manufactured clothing have higher UPFs.[1] If you wear short-sleeved bike jerseys, you can buy separate sleeves especially for UV protection that can actually keep you cooler.

Apply sunscreen with a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of at least 15 to all uncovered skin. Apply sunscreen before you go outside, even on cloudy or cool days—up to 80 percent of UVR penetrates clouds.[2] Some doctors recommend using sunscreen every day. Put a thick layer on all parts of exposed skin and don't forget the

tops of the ears, back of the neck and, if you are bald or have very short or thin hair, the top of your head—sun comes through the air vents in your helmet. Don't forget your UV filter eyewear.

#7 Appropriate Clothing

We know that tight-fitting cycling apparel will not be seen on the Milan runway, but it is essential for safe and comfortable rides. Form follows function. The fit is more than just a uniform. Anything that moves against your skin will chafe. The tight fit of cycling shorts and jerseys prevents chaffing and increases efficiency by reducing wind resistance from flapping fabric, which in itself can be annoying. In addition, some fabrics dissipate heat and moisture in hot weather, and your butt will greatly appreciate the padding on rides that last an hour or longer. If you do not like the tight-to-the-leg shorts there are looser-fitting shorts and, for women, short skirts with a tight-fitting and padded dark-colored under layer.

Cycling jerseys come in a variety of materials and styles with and without designs and many are made with synthetic fibers for moisture wicking, temperature control, and overall body comfort. Bright, reflective colors like orange or yellow increase visibility. Most jerseys have deep open pockets to hold small items such as snacks, keys, money and identification.

Often overlooked by new cyclists, gloves are commonly worn by avid cyclists. Most cycling gloves incorporate strategically placed padding to provide shock absorption, alleviate numbness and prevent painful calluses and blisters. They also provide hand protection from road rash in a spill.

Having a proper shoe for cycling will greatly improve comfort and performance. On short rides, a stiff- soled sneaker may work fine. As you gain confidence on your bike and want to go faster or greater distances, consider investing in a pair of cycling shoes. A good cycling shoe has a stiff sole that turns more of your muscle power to pedal power without injuring the ball of your foot. The type of shoe also depends on whether you have platform or clipless pedals.

#8 Repair Kit

While on the road, be prepared in case you have a flat tire or your bike needs minor adjustment. You can't carry a complete repair shop with you, but you should carry a few tools to make some simple repairs. Even if you don't know how to fix a flat tire, you should carry the essentials for someone else to fix it. These include a spare tube (at least one for each size tire on your bike), tire levers, a ***tire boot*** and a tire pump or ***CO_2 inflater***. You can carry these and other items in a saddlebag or rear trunk bag (see sidebar with suggestions of what to carry). Anything that doesn't fit in your saddlebag can go in the pockets of your jersey. If you ride alone, learn to fix a flat.

ID & ICE	Gloves	Tire levers	
$$$	Food	Tire boot	
Lock & Cable	Sunscreen	CO_2 cylinder	
Medical Supplies	Rags	Screwdriver set	
Keys	Tubes	Allen wrench set	

#9 Emergency Information

Bicycle accidents happen, and sometimes they are serious. Each year over 450,000 of us are taken to hospitals unconscious and without ID. Additionally, up to 98,000 Americans die each year from preventable medical errors. The lack of immediate access to patient healthcare information is the primary source of these errors. Don't become a victim of these errors: carry identification.[3] In 2010, 4,610 Florida cyclists suffered non-fatal injuries[4] and, between 2003 and 2012, 120 Florida cyclists were killed each year (***National Highway Traffic***

Safety Administration); thousands more suffer blackouts, concussions, heart attacks, heat strokes and other serious conditions. In the event of an accident, you'll want your family to be contacted immediately. Don't take the chance of being unidentified in the event of an accident. That is why it is important to have identification, and contact and medical information, often referred to as ICE (In Case of an Emergency), attached to you—preferably—or your bike.

Your ICE should at least have your name, an emergency contact name and phone number. If possible, include your age, medications and medical issues you have, such as allergies, diabetes or asthma, so that medical personnel can treat you appropriately. It is best to have the information attached to your body so that it is more likely to be found. Many riders wear a ***Road ID*** bracelet or anklet, others have an ICE (or ICE-husband, ICE-wife) listed in the contacts on their cell phone (first responders are trained to look there).

If you have significant medical issues, consider wearing a MedicAlert bracelet or necklace. Florida Driver License holders can store their ICE information online with the Florida Department of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles. ***Click here*** to sign up—no charge. Emergency personnel can access your ICE with your license number, so carry that as part of your ICE.

#10 Cycle Computer

As you ride more often and go further afield, you may want to consider adding a bicycle computer or GPS to the handlebars. Cycle computers are less expensive and, depending on the unit, show your distance ridden; ride duration; speed; average speed; your blood pressure, heart rate and calories burned; the air temperature and time of day, among other things.

GPS units are more expensive. Those specific to cycling or trekking provide the same types of information as a cycle computer, but they also show where you are on a map and the route you have taken. They also allow you to design, download and share routes via the Internet. Should you get lost, a GPS can help you find your way back to your starting point.

There are several smart phone apps such as ***MapMyRide***, ***RideWithGPS*** and ***BikeMap*** that provide the same information as cycle computers and GPS units. There are also popular navigational-only apps like ***Galileo Offline Maps***.

Caution: Don't get so fascinated with all the information on your cycle computer or GPS that you forget to pay attention to your cycling.

Wrap Up

Of course, there is a multitude of biking accessories at bike shops, big box stores and online that you may eventually "need." However, you will be well prepared for most eventualities on the road if you have only the 10 listed above. And, they make great gift suggestions!

Further Reading:

1 ***More on sun protective clothing***

2 ***Ultraviolet radiation***

3 ***Why you should carry identification***

4 ***Florida non-fatal injuries***