CYCLING GUIDE

Cycling Gear for Every Budget

What you actually need, what can wait, and what isn't worth buying yet.



GEAR GUIDE

What You Actually Need

A note on the links: some are affiliate links. If you buy through them I may earn a small commission at no extra cost to you — it helps me keep these guides free and up to date. Prices and links current as of July 2026.

Once you have the bike, the next question is usually some version of: *what else do I need?*

Yes, you see the white shoes, white helmet, white socks, and perfectly matching kits all over social media, and suddenly it feels like cycling requires an entirely new wardrobe. Let's be realistic — you don't need every accessory, matching kit, or upgrade before your first ride. You need the things that keep you safe, comfortable, hydrated, and able to get home if something goes wrong.

What you need

At minimum, I recommend getting a helmet, front and rear lights, a water bottle and cage, a cycling kit, and a flat-repair kit.

Cycling kit (shorts or bibs + jersey)

You can ride in normal athletic clothing, but padded cycling shorts or bibs make the experience significantly more comfortable. Personally, I prefer bibs — they stay in place, don't dig into your waist, and are generally more comfortable over longer rides. One important note: you do not wear underwear beneath them. The pad is designed to sit directly against your skin; adding another layer creates friction and defeats the purpose.

Water bottles

You don't need a complicated hydration system. Start with one or two bottles, depending on how long you ride and how easily you can refill along the way.

Pedals and shoes

Many road bikes don't include pedals, so account for them in your budget. You can begin with normal flat pedals and athletic shoes — there's nothing wrong with that. Clipless pedals and cycling shoes provide a more secure connection and improve control, especially as you ride faster or farther, but they're not required for your first ride. If you use them, practice clipping in and out somewhere safe before riding near traffic.

> Everyone falls over at least once. Usually while standing still.

What can wait

You do not immediately need cycling shoes and clipless pedals, a bike computer, a rear radar, a heart-rate monitor, a power meter, carbon wheels, multiple expensive kits, or every accessory you see someone using online. Some are absolutely worth buying later — but none are required to start riding. Get the essentials, ride the bike, and figure out what you actually want before spending money on the rest.

Tubes or tubeless?

Do not overthink this. Start with whatever comes on the bike. If it uses tubes, learn how to replace one. If it's tubeless, learn how to use a plug kit and check the sealant occasionally. Both systems work. Neither requires an immediate conversion.

BY BUDGET

Three Complete Setups

Three complete setups. **Budget** gets you riding without buying junk. **Best Value** is what I'd recommend to most people. **Premium** adds the electronics and training tools you'll likely want later.

Budget Setup

Item	My recommendation	Good alternatives
Helmet	Specialized Align II MIPS	Lazer Tonic KinetiCore; Giro Agilis MIPS
Sunglasses	Tifosi Swank SL	Tifosi Swank; RockBros Photochromic Cycling Glasses
Front light	RAVEMEN FR500	Cateye AMPP900; Lezyne Lite Drive 1200+
Rear light	RAVEMEN CL01	Trek Flare RT; Lezyne Strip Drive Pro 400+
Bibs	Van Rysel RCR-5 Bib Shorts	Pedal Mafia Bib Shorts; Pearl Izumi Attack Bib Shorts
Jersey	Van Rysel Racer Jersey	Pedal Mafia Jersey; Pearl Izumi Classic Jersey

Item	My recommendation	Good alternatives
Cycling shoes	Shimano RC102	Giro Cadet; Specialized Torch 2.0
Pedals	Shimano PD-RS500	Look Keo Classic 3; Shimano PD-R550
Water bottle cages	RockBros Water Bottle Cages (2-pack)	Specialized Rib Cage II + Purist; Tacx Deva + Shiva
Water bottles	CamelBak Podium	—
On-bike repair kit	See Guide 03: What Every Cyclist Should Carry	—
Electric pump	Fanttik X10 Ace Mini Electric Air Pump	—

Best-Value Setup

Item	My recommendation	Good alternatives
Helmet	Specialized Propero 4	Giro Eclipse Spherical; Trek Velocis MIPS
Sunglasses	Tifosi Rail Race	Oakley Sutro Lite Sweep; 100% S3
Front light	Trek Ion Pro RT	Lezyne Macro Drive 1400+; Trek Commuter Pro RT
Rear light + radar	Garmin Varia RTL515	Wahoo TRACKR Radar; Trek CarBack
Bibs	Rapha Core Cargo Bib Shorts	Assos MILLE GT Bib Shorts C2; Castelli Espresso Bibshort
Jersey	Rapha Core Jersey	Castelli Espresso Jersey; Assos MILLE GT Jersey S11
Cycling shoes	Shimano RC703	Specialized Torch 3.0; Lake CX219
Pedals	Shimano 105 PD-R7000	Look Keo 2 Max Carbon; Shimano Ultegra PD-R8000
Bottles & cages	Specialized Rib Cage II + Purist MoFlo Bottles	Elite Custom Race Plus + Fly Tex; Arundel Sport + CamelBak Podium
On-bike repair kit	See Guide 03: What Every Cyclist Should Carry	—
Electric pump	CYCPLUS AS2 Pro	Fanttik X10 Ace; CYCPLUS AS2 Pro Max
Bike computer	Garmin Edge 540	Wahoo ELEMNT BOLT 3; Garmin Edge 840
Heart-rate monitor	**Polar H10**	Wahoo TRACKR Heart Rate

Item	My recommendation	Good alternatives
Power meter (optional; replaces pedals)	Favero Assioma	Favero Assioma UNO; 4iiii PRECISION 3+

Premium Setup

Item	My recommendation	Good alternatives
Helmet	Giro Aries Spherical	Specialized S-Works Prevail 3; POC Ventral Air Mips
Front light	Outbound Lighting Detour	Garmin Varia Vue; Trek Commuter Pro RT
Rear radar light	Garmin Varia RearVue 820	Garmin Varia RCT715; Wahoo TRACKR Radar
Bibs	Rapha Pro Team Bib Shorts III	Assos EQUIPE RS S11; MAAP Team Bib Evo
Jersey	Rapha Pro Team Training Jersey III	MAAP Evade Pro Base 2.0; Assos EQUIPE RS Jersey S11
Cycling shoes	Shimano S-PHYRE RC903	Specialized S-Works Torch; Lake CX333
Pedals	Shimano Ultegra PD-R8000	Shimano Dura-Ace PD-R9100; Look Keo Blade Ceramic
Sunglasses	Oakley Encoder Strike (Prizm Road)	100% Hypercraft SQ; POC Propel
Bottles & cages	Arundel Mandible Cages + Specialized Purist Bottles	SILCA Sicuro Titanium + Purist; Elite Rocko Carbon + Fly Tex
On-bike repair kit	See Guide 03: What Every Cyclist Should Carry	—
Electric pump	SILCA Elettrico Ultimate Inflator	CYCPLUS AS2 Pro Max; Fumpa Nano
Bike computer	Garmin Edge 1050	Hammerhead Karoo; Wahoo ELEMNT ROAM 3
Heart-rate monitor	Garmin HRM 600	Polar H10; Wahoo TRACKR Heart Rate
Power meter (optional; replaces pedals)	Favero Assioma PRO RS-2	Garmin Rally RS200; Quarq Force AXS Power Meter
Indoor trainer (optional)	Garmin Tacx NEO 3M	Wahoo KICKR MOVE; Elite Justo 2

BEFORE YOU BUY

Fit & Compatibility Notes

A few things that trip people up when they buy gear piecemeal. None are complicated — you just want to avoid ordering two parts that don't work together.

Shoes and pedals must match

Road pedals (Shimano SPD-SL, Look Keo) use a three-bolt cleat and a three-bolt road shoe. Cleats are specific to the pedal brand — Look cleats don't fit Shimano pedals and vice versa — so buy the cleats made for your pedals. If you'd rather walk comfortably off the bike (gravel, commuting, spin class), a two-bolt SPD system on a shoe with a two-bolt sole is the friendlier choice. Just don't mix a road shoe with a mountain cleat, or a road cleat with a mountain pedal.

A power meter replaces your pedals

The power meters in these tables are pedal-based — they *are* your pedals. If you buy one, skip the separate pedal line so you're not paying twice.

Bottle cages are universal; mounts usually aren't

Cages bolt to the standard two-bolt mount on almost every frame, so any cage fits. Computer and light mounts are more brand-specific — a Garmin quarter-turn mount and a Wahoo mount aren't the same, though most head units ship with an out-front mount and adapters exist. Match the mount to the computer you choose.

Helmets are sized by head circumference

Measure around your head just above the eyebrows and buy to that number, not to "medium." MIPS and similar liners are a safety feature worth having; they don't change how you size.

> **DON'T FORGET THE REPAIR KIT**
>
> Every rider should carry a small on-bike kit — enough to fix a flat and get home. It's its own short resource so it doesn't get buried here: **What Every Cyclist Should Carry** covers the exact kit for tubed and tubeless tires.

HAVEN'T CHOSEN THE BIKE YET?

Gear is step two. If you're still deciding on the bike itself, start with **Beginner Road Bike Buyer's Guide** — it walks you through type, size, and budget, and ends with personalized help if you want it.

christomshack.io

Get the essentials, ride the bike, and add the rest once you know what you actually want.