

Women on Wheels

**All female mountain-biking programs foster new confidence on and off the trail.
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By Hattie Klotz

When Dominique Larocque started her Women on Mountain Bikes weekend four years ago, just 15 people signed up. This year she couldn't accept all the women who wanted to attend the two-day event at Camp Fortune.

Since the barn-like building that she uses can seat only 70 people comfortably, Ms. Larocque ended up with 20 disappointed women on a waiting list, hoping for a last-minute cancellation.

The weekend bike workshop has grown by word of mouth. "Everybody comes back and brings a friend," says Ms. Larocque, a former national mountain bike team member and national inline skating champion.

"It's social and there's a great camaraderie among kindred spirits together. Many people say to me that they finally feel like they actually belong," she says. "What I'm trying to do here is allow people to fulfill their aspirations."

But what actually happens during the weekend is far more physical. Beginners to advanced riders learn to improve their downhill skills, jump over obstacles such as trees, stumps and boulders, negotiate tricky paths with uneven surfaces, rocks or ruts, learn to get their weight in the correct place and build confidence on their bikes.

"It's all about the sisterhood," explains Ina Requard, a 52-year old teacher who has attended all four camps. "We cheer one another on and we just get out there and get over the fear of doing it."

Ms. Requard, who has become such a devotee of the sport that she is now an instructor on the Women on Mountain Bikes course, is convinced that these all women weekends are the perfect learning environment because men tend to be more aggressive, more courageous and stronger than women on bikes – and that can be intimidating.

"Women seem to feel better just having women watching them," she says, "as learning with men is more difficult. Women discover they can do things and it is fun when you see the look of triumph on their faces."

For Christine Overvelde, the all female course was just what was needed to launch her enthusiasm for the sport.

"As a novice I find it hard to find women to bike with so this was a great opportunity. And men tend to be more aggressive on the trails so it's hard to keep pace," she says. "But during this weekend, I found myself doing things I never thought I'd be able to do on a mountain bike."

