Subject: RE: Article on bicycle seats from NY Times

The easy thing would be to ignore the various fear-mongering publicity-hounding press-release-and-book-writing crowd that wants to create waves by claiming that riding a bike is bad for guys. But of course, I can't. This is a subject that gets me pretty annoyed, because is almost-always mistakes the bicycle seat as the problem (which in some cases it might be) and ignores the issue of proper fit to the bicycle, of which the saddle is, in fact, a subset... but more the location of the saddle, as well as handlebars and pedals. So below is my response when a very good customer sent me a link to the latest such story. --Mike--

> Hey, was curious if you've seen this, and what you think:
> http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/28/science/28tier.html?_r=3&pag
ewanted=all>

-----Original Message-----
From: Mike Jacoubowsky [mailto:MikeJ@ChainReaction.com]
Sent: Friday, August 26, 2011 10:32 PM
Subject: RE: Article on bicycle seats from NY Times

Before getting into this, the full text of the study may be found here-
https://www.moonsaddle.com/Articles.asp?ID=136

"When I tried a no-nose model for my 16-mile daily commute, it was so much more comfortable that I promptly threw away the old saddle. But over the years I've had zero success persuading any other cyclists to switch, even when I quote the painfully succinct warning from Steven Schrader, the reproductive physiologist at Niosh who did the experiment with police officers."

I have serious doubts that many, if any of the people with "problems" in the article had been properly fit to a bike or, worse, wonder how many were riding super-soft saddles that pass the "thumb test" but create serious problems because they are so soft that your weight pushes down on the front and back, causing the center of the saddle to push up, exactly where you don't want it to. That's the reason that softer isn't usually better; you require a certain amount of support to keep the saddle from contacting areas that shouldn't be stressed.

If someone wants to prove that bike saddles of a particular type are better than others, they should first make sure that the "inferior" saddles are properly set up and the rider properly fit to their bike, and perhaps do a before & after test of that, before trumpeting the marketing claims of someone wanting to sell a new type of saddle that, on the face of it, looks like maybe it would address the problem (and has a marketing campaign based upon fear).

The author says himself "Even if you didn't feel any symptoms, even if you didn't believe the researchers' warnings, even if you thought it was perfectly healthy to feel numb during a ride - why not switch just for comfort's sake? Why go on crushing your crotch?" The "comfort" reference is key here. Why isn't someone comfortable, while someone else is? It's a lot more than just saddle design. And it's going to be different for different people.

And mountain bikes are, by far, going to be the worst offenders for landing sensitive parts of the anatomy where they shouldn't land, or pressured where they shouldn't be pressured, because of the more-upright riding position (putting nearly all the weight on the rider's tail end rather than distributing some of the weight forward). And yes, the issues are going to be worse for people who are out of shape and jumping curbs and plowing through potholes in urban environments. Not that I'd put any officers I've seen in that category.

"Before the study, nearly three-quarters of the officers complained of numbness while riding. After six months, fewer than one-fifth complained."
Let's see here. 75% complained of numbness while riding. 75%???!!! And they kept riding? I would be interested in knowing what percentage of them filed for disability of some sort. Not that I'm cynical or anything. And for the truly-cynical, we are talking guys

here, and given the opportunity, is a guy going to want to brag that his sex life has improved or that it's in the toilet?

So no, I don't have an opinion at all. :-)

This is not to say that there aren't people who would benefit from different saddle designs than the norm. But let's see some studies that are more-intelligently done, and include the following-

#1: Study people with issues and improvement, or lack thereof, that occurs from nothing more than attention paid to their fit on the bike
#2: Take those who still had issues after being fit and see what happens with the miracle saddle change. Does that subset benefit as much as group 1?

There are definitely people with real issues that need to be addressed, but the lack of adequate controls for these studies is alarming and causes one to wonder if the tests were designed to support a belief rather than to test it. --Mike--