

ertainment

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Casco Bay Bicycle Club members Andy and Cheryl Oliver get a bike in shape for spring touring at their Portland Street shop.

Staff photo by Doug Jones

Bikers chase cabin fever away

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Staff Writer

Never mind that winter's sand still coats the streets. Never mind that April is officially mud season.

Warmer weather means only one thing: It's time to go bike riding.

Time to oil the chain, inflate the tires and dust off that bike you propped up against the lawn mower in your basement last fall.

Members of the Casco Bay Bicycle Club are doing that now — in earnest.

The club is gearing up for its third season with a membership that has blossomed from a core of about 15 to more than 80 bikers.

Anyone over age 18 who can straddle a bike is welcome, although 16- and 17-year-olds may join with their parents.

Once hooked, though, bikers don't stop. The club has several members who have reached their 60s, says club President Tony Scarpelli, who is 45 himself.

More people are turning to biking because it is gentler than running on aging knees and helps to keep off extra pounds, Scarpelli says.

"This keeps me young, especially when I'm riding with some of the young whipper-snappers," says the Maine Medical Center research engineer. "But most of the members in the club are leisure bicyclists. We're not a racing club."

Every weekend from May to September club members take rides of 25 to 100 miles through the surrounding countryside. This year's first ride — to Old Orchard Beach — is scheduled for May 1.

The club is the brainchild of Back Bay Bicycle shop owner Andy Oliver, a Wisconsin native, who spent winters dreaming of sunny days when he could take off on his bike again.

One winter three years ago he decided to find other bikers with cabin fever. He put an ad in the newspaper calling the first meeting of the Casco Bay Bicycle Club.

"Three people came," he says. "I showed a movie of the world championship race with Greg LeMond winning. Four people came the next month. Then bike season started and it grew from there."

The club has attracted people like Mason Smith and Barry Alexander.

Smith, 54, is training to bike the Lewis and Clark trail from St. Louis to South Dakota in May. He also is writing a guidebook for a tour of the Benedict Arnold Trail from Cambridge, Mass., to Quebec.

Alexander bought a bike last fall and

A few tips for bikers

- Always bike with traffic, as though you are riding in a car. Bikers are subject to the same traffic laws as drivers, so pay attention to stop signs and traffic lights.
- Wear a helmet, especially when riding in traffic. Helmets are both cheaper to buy and less uncomfortable than fixing a cracked skull.
- Be courteous to drivers. They're bigger than you and will always win. Remember that while you both are dodging potholes, they are trying to dodge you as well.
- Keep your legs moving in a steady number of revolutions, called a cadence. You'll get less tired biking that way. That means shifting before the hill gets too steep and pedaling over the top and down the other side.
- Practice "ankling." On the downstroke, point your heel down and on the upstroke, point your toe down. That way you'll be peddling through the entire revolution, which will help move you along faster and more efficiently, especially on hills.
- Drink a lot of water. When you sweat, the wind created by biking will lick moisture away from your skin. That will dehydrate you.
- Munch high-energy foods such as nuts and raisins on long rides, not candybars.
- Take a bike repair or maintenance course, or buy a bike repair book. Nothing is more frustrating than being

stuck miles from home with a broken bike and only your thumb for transportation.

● "Anybody's Bike Bag Book" is a condensed version of Tom Cuthbertson's classic "Anybody's Bike Book." Carry it with you and you will save yourself hours of frustration and your thumb some wear and tear. If you can't understand all the funny pictures and diagrams in bike repair books, take a course. L.L. Bean is offering several and some local recreation departments also hold them, although they fill quickly.

● Bean's bicycle repair and maintenance course runs three nights, May 3, 10 and 17, from 7 to 10 p.m. at Bean's Route 1 conference center in Freeport. Enrollment is limited to 12 students, who must sign up in advance. The cost is \$35. Call 865-4761 ext. 7800.

● Bean's other clinics are on overnight bike touring, fixing bikes on the road and wide-tire bicycling. All take place at 7:30 p.m. at the retail store on April 11, 18 and 25.

● Scarborough is offering both a bike repair clinic and a bicycle touring clinic this spring. The dates have not been set yet, but they will start the first week in May. Registration will be the third week in April and the course will fill on a first-come, first-served basis. The course fee is \$15 for residents, \$20 for non-residents. For more information call 883-8427.

joined the club with little riding experience.

"I'm 42 years old and I wanted to combine exercise with pleasure," he said. "I wanted to get in touch with nature and enjoy some of the things I go by at 60 miles an hour in a car."

This club is actually a revival of a Casco Bay club which existed during the early 1980s.

"They were hard-core bikies," says Oliver, whose wife Cheryl Oliver was a member. "They went to the grocery store with baskets on their bikes."

Beside the purely recreational rides, the club holds time trials on Thursdays for those who pedal fast, and sometimes those members will take off together on Saturdays.

Last year club members took 20 rides and twice that number are already planned this year, Scarpelli says.

"It's nice country to ride in," he says. "There are many areas that are extremely

good for biking, roads that go along the shore, plenty of nice rolling hills.

"And you don't have the traffic you have in a lot of areas."

Oliver likes the area so much, "If I didn't live here, I'd come here for vacation to go riding," he says.

"The (state) leash law is nice because no dogs are loose to chase you. We used to ride in constant fear in Wisconsin because of the farmers' dogs."

Maine also has an abundance of dirt roads and wooded trails ideal for "fat-tire" mountain bikes. Those bikes allow riders to sit upright and they have wider tires for added stability. Add thinner tires and the bikes are perfect for pothole-studded city streets.

Scarpelli likes to head out Route 9 to Falmouth and make a loop up Wood Road to Woodville Road and back to Portland along Allen Avenue Extension or back along Route 9 — a distance of 15 to 20 miles.

Portland itself has Baxter Boulevard, a pleasant, although bumpy, ride around Back Cove popular with walkers and joggers. Glimpses of waterfowl are also possible.

Portland also has marked bicycle routes through the city. Maps are no longer available, but the signs are up.

The growth of the Casco Bay club is symbolic of the growth of biking.

"You see bikes in virtually every TV advertisement now," Oliver says. "That's good evidence of what's popular."

The group meets the third Tuesday of every month in the Portland Public Safety building on Middle Street.

Meetings usually have a theme. For example, last month's meeting was about building bicycle frames.

This month's meeting, scheduled for 7 p.m. April 19, will feature a lecture on first aid.