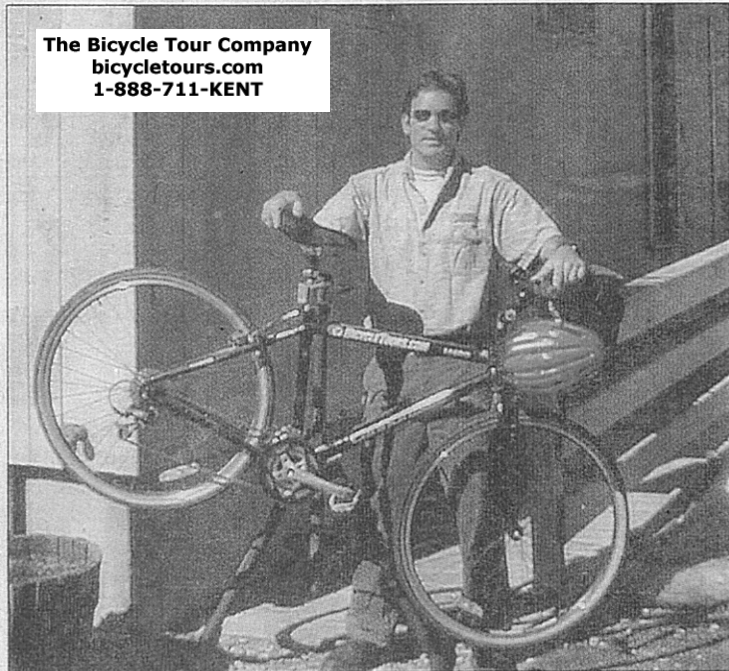


Bicycle Enthusiast Shares His Love of the Sport

The Bicycle Tour Company
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Photograph by Bernadette Shustak

Sal Lilienthal, owner of The Bicycle Tour Company, with a Cannondale bike.

On the Job with...

SAL LILIENTHAL

BY BERNADETTE SHUSTAK
Associate Editor

If you're looking for a different way to spend a day or weekend, or a unique vacation idea, you might want to give Sal Lilienthal, owner of The Bicycle Tour Company in Kent a call.

His company, now in its third year of operation, provides clients with custom cycling trips.

Although The Bicycle Tour Company is young, Mr. Lilienthal has been involved with bikes for a while.

"When I was in high school I went on a bike tour with a company in Massachusetts," the cycling enthusiast said. "And then in the summers I worked for them as a student hosteler, and in college I led trips in the Colorado Rockies,

Paris, Holland and Denmark."

Bicycles also led him to set up shop in Kent.

"I used to come canoeing here with my family as a kid," he explained. "One of the reasons I live here is because it's beautiful and I can walk or go riding with my dog."

Raised in Greenwich, Mr. Lilienthal has traveled all over the world.

Before starting his own business, he worked for the Olympic Cycling Team as a mechanic.

"In 1992 I traveled with the athletes providing technical support," he said. "I spent time at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, and worked three years for the Motorola-sponsored cycling team from 1994 to 1996."

The team was based in Belgium and he attended a World Cup with them.

Living in Belgium for three

Please see **Cycling**, Page 6

Cycling expert shares his love of the sport

(Continued from Page 1)

years enabled him to learn a little Flemish, and he also speaks a little Spanish and French.

Knowing other languages is a big help with his current business, since it is an international venture.

There are currently 15 people on staff at The Bicycle Tour Company. Staff members with different backgrounds lead different trips. For example, European trips are guided by those with experience in foreign countries.

Veronique Mertl often leads tours in France. Her mother is French, but she is an American.

"She's the perfect ultimate leader," Mr. Lilienthal said. "She understands the American mentality and understands the French."

Not all the trips they offer are on foreign soil. Many are right in our own backyard. There are day trips to Greenwich, Princeton, nearby New York and New York City. Weekend-long trips include jaunts to Martha's Vineyard, a Berkshire Weekend, and a tour that includes the New England landscape and covered bridges. Week-long tours of France's Burgundy and Beaujolais regions are also offered, among other over-seas destinations.

According to Mr. Lilienthal, a bicycle tour can be as long or as short as needed, and can be as easy or as difficult as you wish.

The smallest size tour is for one person, and group size can vary.

Sometimes people will call him from New York City. They might be on a budget and ask him what they can do. He might suggest renting bikes and going on a

self-guided tour.

The Bicycle Tour Company can provide a cycling tour for anyone, and every budget.

The company is planning a new Washington D.C. tour which will start in Great Falls, Md., go to Georgetown, and then ride along the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal.

Mr. Lilienthal would also like to set up a six-day bike trip in Jackson, Wyo. There are also plans to add more destinations in Gloucester, Mass., Italy and Australia.

Besides arranging bike tours for individuals and families, Mr. Lilienthal has also led corporate tours. A recent trip took him to the Everglades in Florida where one day was spent canoeing and one day was spent cycling.

Clients can use their own bikes, or one from the company. "usually they wind up using ours, once they see them," he said.

A typical day tour would involve meeting at a starting point, say in Princeton, N.J. or Shelter Island, N.Y. Helmets, route notes, equipment, maps and water bottles would be provided, and riders can choose easy or moderate routes. The group would meet later at a restaurant, have a clam bake or something like that, later in the day. Actual riding time might only be around two or three hours.

A day trip easy route might be around seven miles, while a moderate route is 15 to 25 miles. Different routes for different rider abilities are available. All routes are at the riders own pace.

Weekend or week-long trips would include accommodations as well.

Mr. Lilienthal provides his clients with top-of-the-line Cannondale bikes.

"I use them because they are local," he said. "They are headquartered in Bethel."

The racks the company uses to hold the bicycles are sponsored by Thule in Seymour, Conn. "If I can do something local, I do," he added.

Depending on terrain, riders use mountain bikes, hybrid bikes, or road bikes.

The mountain bikes have the widest tire of the three, and are good for traction and covering rough country.

Hybrid bikes have a medium size tire, and road bikes, have the narrowest tire width of the three and are used more for streets and well-established paths.

There is also a choice of handlebar styles, either straight handles, which according to Mr. Lilienthal, some riders feel are more comfortable, and *turned* handles.

The company owns a station wagon, which is used to transport riders and equipment, as well as a 15-person van and a trailer that holds 30 bikes. The support van follows the group and carries equipment, drinks and first aid supplies.

"We are also the co-sponsor of a women's bike team," Mr. Lilienthal said. Terri Precision Cycling, based in upstate New York is the other sponsor. The team is currently racing in California.

Besides arranging bicycle tours, The Bicycle Tour Company also rents bikes from its Kent location. A \$25 per day bike rental includes helmet, route notes, handlebar bag and maps.

"One day I decided to put a bike out to see if people would rent them," Mr. Lilienthal said. "It's a nice service, and we also do all the maintenance and repairs."

He said that sometimes bikers come by looking for equipment, tire tubes or bike pumps, which he also carries.

Mr. Lilienthal's home is his office.

The neatly arranged space is above New England Traditions set back off of North Main Street. Bikes and other equipment are stored in one part, while office space and living quarters make up the remainder.

Mr. Lilienthal, who is single, shares his home/office with CB, his 15-month old yellow lab. He jokes that people often try to figure out what the "CB" stands for. (It's actually Cornwall Bridge, where he got the dog.)

Besides his business, he also teaches a course through Litchfield, entitled "A Day in the Life of the Tour de' France."

He said he tries to go on as many of the biking trips as possible. He said he would like to bike from Colorado to California, which would finish a cross-country ride he started when he rode from Virginia to Colorado.

His favorite trip? "The one I'm doing. I live in the present," he said. "Each trip has its own special features."

The Bicycle Tour Company has its own Web Site at bicycletours.com, and can be reached by e-mail at infobicycletours.com or by telephone at 860-927-1742 or 888-7110KENT.