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What makes a track bike roll?



Chris Sweeney and Town Travis/Medill

Track bikes differ in several ways from normal bicycles. Scroll over the buttons to learn some of the differences.

Brakeless bikes are the norm at Northbrook Velodrome

BY CHRISTOPHER B SWEENEY AND TOWN TRAVIS  
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As the weather warms up and gas prices continue to soar, many Chicagoans are looking to their bicycles as a cheap and healthy mode of transportation. In Northbrook, however, an entirely different breed of cyclist is pushing pedals and riding laps.



Chris Sweeney/Medill

The Northbrook Velodrome opened for the season earlier this month and is offering instructional sessions and hosting races every week.

The Ed Rudolph Velodrome, one of only 22 velodromes in the country, opened for the season earlier this month and now hosts training sessions and races every week.

A velodrome is a steeply-curved, oval-shaped track specifically designed for track bikes. It looks similar to a NASCAR track but on a much smaller scale, and no engines are allowed. The Northbrook Velodrome has been around since 1959 and is the only one in Illinois.



Town Travis/Medill

The velodrome is designed for track bikes which are aerodynamic and lightweight.

"We run a program to introduce new riders to track racing and at the same time we structure everything so advanced riders get a really good work out," said Kevin Perez, a volunteer instructor at the velodrome.

"These programs have done a very good job in increasing the participation, not only the ridership but also the spectators who come out to watch the racing," he said. "The Thursday racing is really good for the community. It draws a lot of people to the velodrome and increases awareness in the community about cyclists and cycling in general."

The instructional sessions, for a one-day \$5 license fee, are hosted every Monday and Tuesday. A race night is scheduled every Thursday, weather permitting. If it rains the slick surface of the track makes it impossible for cyclists to ride safely.

"It's obviously a lot of fun, great for pack-riding skills, an excellent workout and a great way to build leg strength," said Jeff Holland, a new recruit at the velodrome.

Most of the riders bring track bikes to the sessions and races. Track bikes look like the traditional 10-speed road bikes that are familiar to most people, but they have many modifications to make them ride smoother and go faster on the track. Racers can go up to nearly 40 mph.

The design of the bikes allows for the rider to be seated high enough to put his or her full leg power into each pedal stroke, yet remain crouched in an aerodynamic position. They range in price from \$550 to several thousand dollars, said Christian Soto, at Turin Bicycle in Evanston.

The bikes are made from lightweight, resilient materials such as aluminum, titanium and carbon fiber. Track bikes generally weigh less than 17 pounds, with most weighing in the low teens. Normal bikes start at around 26 pounds, Soto said.

A track bike is not a requirement to ride at the velodrome -- you only need a helmet.

The velodrome is open year-round for recreational use. Races are held May through September, closing with the USA Cycling Master Track National Championships.

For more information call the Northbrook Park District at (847) 291-2980 or visit [www.northbrookvelodrome.org](http://www.northbrookvelodrome.org).