



## On your bike

With excellent tracks and beautiful scenery, the sport of mountain biking is taking off

Main Picture: Shing Mun Country Park offers stunning views.  
Left: Mountain bikers train in a country park.  
大圖：景致優美的城門郊野公園。左：越野單車手在郊野公園進行訓練。

A local mountain biker in action on a popular biking trail, in the Tai Lam country park. 一名本地越野單車手在大欖郊野公園的單車徑上飛馳。



The Beijing Olympics has been hailed as an outstanding success for its spectacular ceremonies and glitch-free organisation, its smiling volunteers and the riveting sporting dramas played out before cheering stadiums and a worldwide television audience of billions.

Much will live in the memory, but one of the dearest wishes of Games organisers is that August's events also serve as longer-term inspiration, promoting the message that participation in sports can change lives for the better through fun, friendship, fitness and competition.

Not everyone, of course, can hope to stand atop the medal podium but, in their own way and following one of the Olympic ideals, everyone can get out and take part. And, fortunately, that appears to be exactly what is happening in Hong Kong. People are heading in record numbers to local swimming pools, tennis courts and jogging tracks and, inspired by the thrills and heroics beamed from Beijing, they are also lining up to test their skills or try their luck at some previously less familiar sports.

Among those, mountain biking is one that is already seeing a surge in interest. In no small part that is thanks to the attention garnered by Hong Kong Olympic competitor Chan Chun-hing. He may not have finished with a medal in the men's cross-country mountain bike event over the tough course at Laoshan, but his efforts and the excitement of the overall spectacle introduced many to a new sporting possibility, and has definitely encouraged people to get on their bikes and take to the hills and trails.

What beginners will find is that, at present, there are nine trails open in Hong Kong, mainly in the country parks in Sai Kung, Lantau Island and Tai Lam. Traversing their slopes, tracks and changing terrain offers great outdoor exercise and, on the faster stretches, a true sense of exhilaration. It also gets riders out of the city and "back to nature" as they zip along coastal paths, pedal up leafy inclines, or pause at a hilltop rest stop to contemplate stunning sea views or enjoy the cooling onshore breezes.

Advocates for the sport are keen to point out that mountain biking is open to most people. Dispelling any impression that it is only for the super-fit or for serious competitors, the 6,000 to 7,000 regular participants in Hong Kong include young and "not so young" who represent a wide diversity of backgrounds and professions.

What many of them most appreciate is the social aspect of the sport. They love being part of a tight-knit though expanding community, which gives them the chance to get together with friends and ride with a group of a similar standard for what they can be sure will be a great day out.

All it takes to get started is an easily obtained permit from the Country and Marine Parks Authority and a modest investment in the right equipment. For basic safety, that should include helmet, gloves, shoes and padding for knees and elbows. And there is no shortage of bike models and parts to choose from. Hong Kong now has several good bike stores where it is possible to get expert advice and weigh up



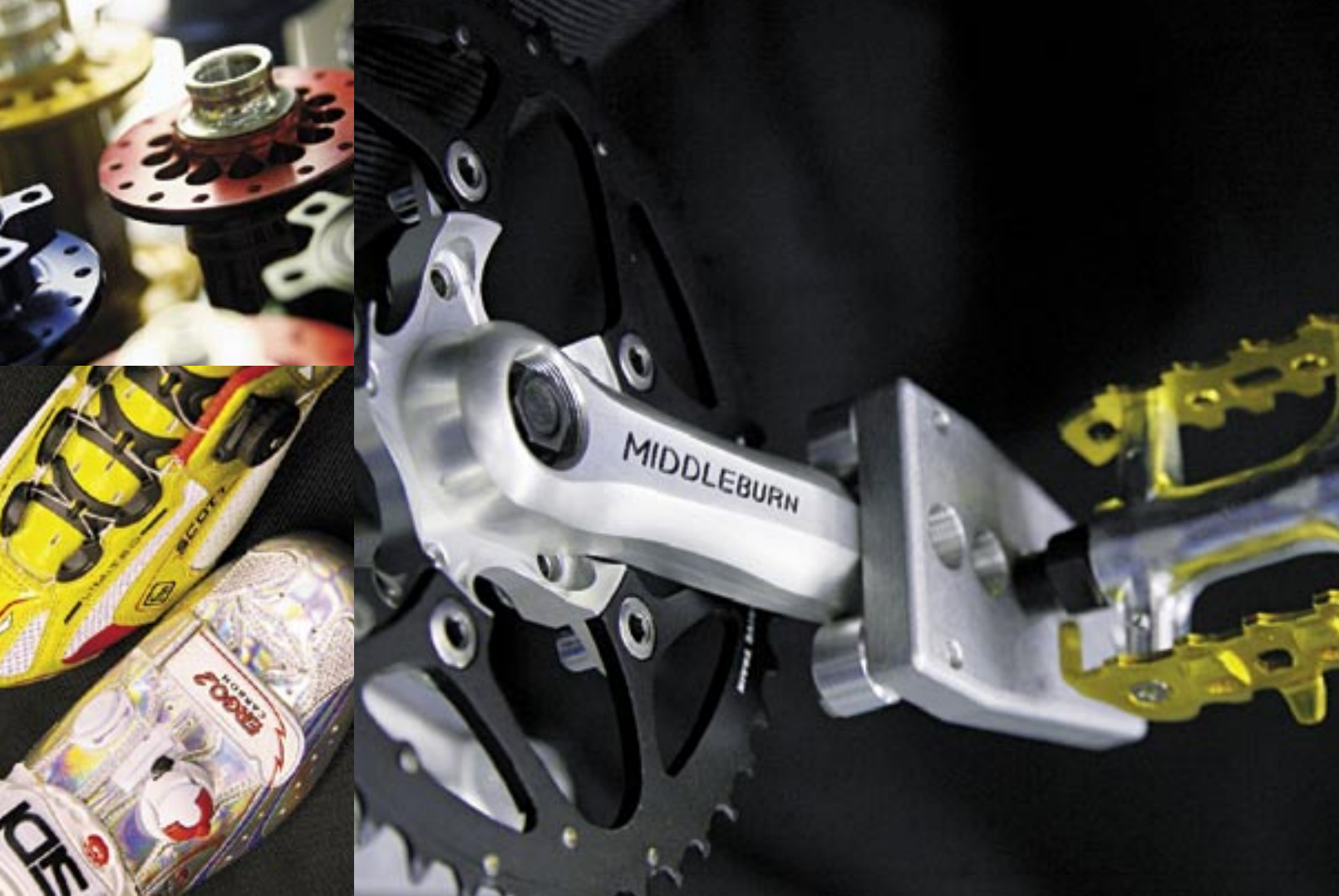
the comparative advantages of a heavy-duty model which comes "fully armoured", against a lighter "free ride" type or cross-country bike.

Tyres, frames and hi-tech accessories can all come into the reckoning and, for many enthusiasts, learning about the various technical aspects can be another great attraction to the sport. Costs vary but generally someone can be kitted out and ready for the trail for an outlay of as little as HK\$4,000, and it is then just a matter of getting aboard.

As with any sport, there are skills to master and rules and etiquette to observe. They range from handling a switchback or overtaking at speed, to approaching a log on a downhill or passing a hiker. To help understand such intricacies the Hong Kong Mountain Bike Association (HKMBA) makes available an abundance of educational information via its website and through the efforts of enthusiastic volunteers dedicated to clearing away practical obstacles and opening up suitable new trails.

According to Bob Smith, chairman of the HKMBA, it can sometimes be "slow going" in discussions with various government bodies and other authorities. Nevertheless, the association is pushing ahead with its agenda to promote the sport and increase the number of active participants. The main objective is to press for a more extensive network of trails in Tai Lam Country Park, design and maintain routes specifically for beginners, campaign for better access to trail heads by public transport, and establish more events and competitions.

"The biggest problem at the moment is that there are too few trails in Hong Kong to accommodate the number of mountain bikers, and some of them were inadequately designed originally, without stable slopes and good water run-off," Mr Smith says. "But given the opportunity, the sport will grow. It is open to all levels – kids, older folks – and there is a wide demographic. It has a great exercise aspect, the chance for friends to get together for organised fun rides, and the competitive element with mountain bike and adventure races. There is a lot of potential here and one of the things we would now like to do is take advantage of the momentum the Olympics has created."



## 越野單車

舉世矚目的北京奧運，無論是壯觀的開幕式、無可挑剔的組織力、笑面迎人的義工，以致於各世界級場館舉行的精彩賽事，在全球億萬觀眾的心目中，都留下難忘的回憶。腦海中除了那些精彩的片段之外，主辦者最希望透過連場激烈的賽事，可以提高大眾對參與體育運動的熱誠，宣揚運動是歡樂、友愛、健康以至和平競技的訊息。

要踏上奧運的頒獎台確非易事，不過奧運的精神是無分彼此，男女老幼，不管技術水平高低均可參與。一場奧運確實令到更多香港人樂於參與不同類型的運動，世界級運動員的英姿吸引更多人到泳池暢泳、到網球場比拼、到緩跑徑舒展身心；一些以往較少人留意的運動項目也開始受到注目。

越野單車便是其中一種越來越多人參與的運動項目。奧運舉行期間，於崎嶇的老山賽道舉行的男子越野賽，香港代表陳振興雖然無緣競逐獎牌，但他不屈的鬥志及激烈的賽事，便激勵起不少人一試踏上越野單車，在高低不平的山道風馳電掣的興奮。

香港目前有九條越野單車賽道，主要位於西貢、大嶼山及大欖郊野公園內。賽道地勢不一，為參與者提供最佳戶外運動的機會。暫離煩囂，細賞戶外景致，在沿岸或樹蔭下的車道馳騁，在山丘上稍事休息兼欣賞醉人的海景或感受清涼的海風，甚至在令人心跳加速的下坡道上疾馳而下，越野單車都是非同凡響的運動經驗。

香港目前約有六千至七千人定期參與這類活動，他們的背景迥異，平日工作性質不一，由年輕人到中年人都有，可見越野單車並不局限於高技術水平或體能超卓的人士。能與好友或體能相約的人一同舒展身心，才是越野單車吸引普羅大眾的原因。

參與越野單車活動，首先要向郊野公園及海岸公園管理局申請郊野公園踏單車許可證。至於購買合適的裝備，豐儉由人，惟安全至上，設備應該包括頭盔、手套、合適的單車鞋、護膝及護肘。至於單車方面，型號或配件舉目凡多，新手的可以向一般單車店查詢。你應先比量各種不同單車的性，例如保護性能較好的車身可能較重，車身輕巧的就較為適合越野賽道。裝嵌理想的戰車也是參與越野單車的一大樂事，車胎、車身的構造及選配各種高科技配件均有學問，不過，即使以四千元的價錢，已可以裝備齊全。

一如其他運動項目，要享受越野單車的樂趣，先要學習一定的技巧，了解及遵守規則及禮儀。香港爬山單車協會的網站搜羅相關的資訊，由超車到倒車的技巧，到該會的義工怎樣推廣這項運動均有介紹，增加大眾對越野單車的了解並排解疑難。

協會主席Bob Smith表示，向政府部門及其他公營機構爭取更多有利舉行越野單車的條件確實不易，不過該會仍會積極於本地推廣越野單車運動，從而增加參與者的數目。他指出，目前最重要的是擴大大欖郊野公園內的單車道，設計及開闢更多適合新手的車道，要求增加接駁到車道起點的公共交通工具，以及舉辦更多活動和比賽。

Bob Smith稱：「舉行越野單車目前最大的困難是車道不足，部份現行車道的設計不良，平穩的車道不夠，積水疏導設計不足。不過我們相信，這項運動可有長遠的發展。越野單車老幼咸宜，既適合一家大小及與友好同歡，又可提供一定的運動量，加上具備競賽的元素，我們希望能延續大眾對奧運的熱情，繼續推廣越野單車運動。」